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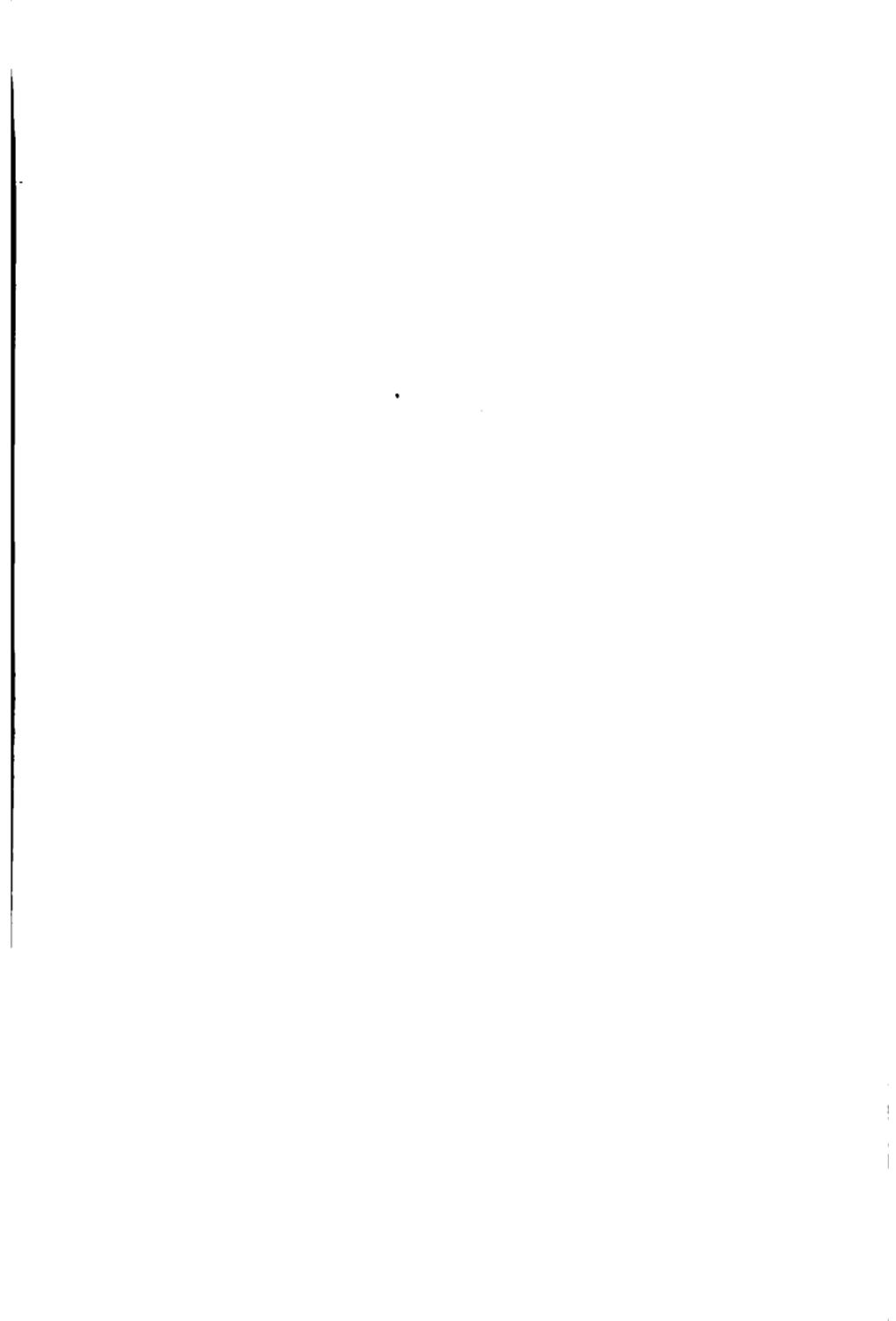
THE CHAMPION OF ODIN



OR
*VIKING LIFE
IN THE DAY
OF OLD*

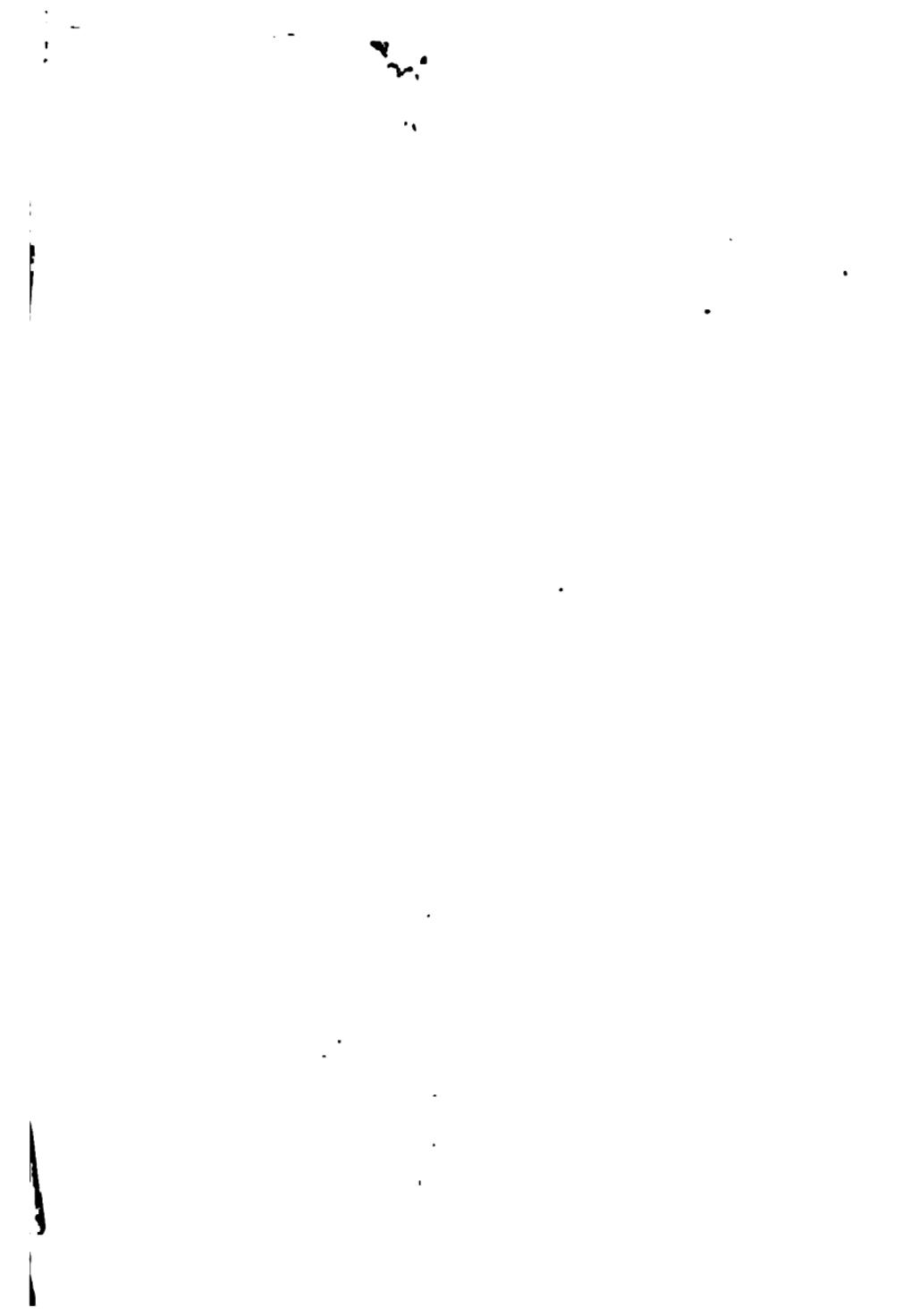


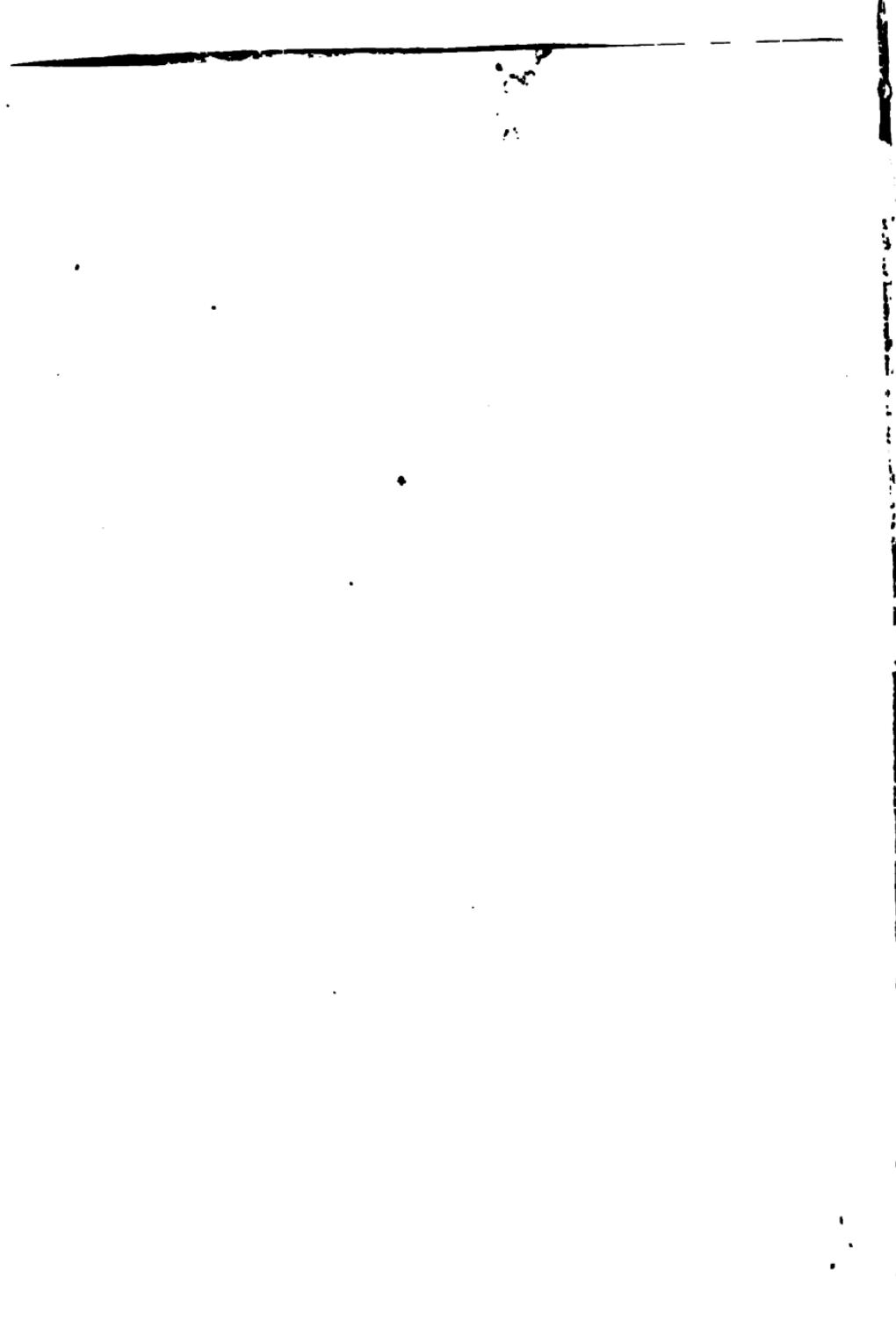






"THEY CARRIED HIM IN TRIUMPH UP THE PATH THAT LED TO THE
YARL'S HALL."—*p. 324. (Frontispiece.)*





THE
CHAMPION OF ODIN;
OR,
VIKING LIFE IN THE DAYS OF OLD.

A Tale of Ancient War.

BY
J. FREDERICK HODGETTS,
Author of "Harold, the Boy-Earl," "Ivan Dobroff," etc.

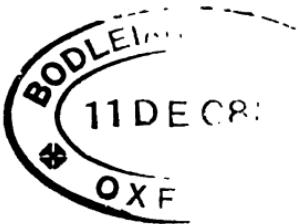
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GENERAL SIR JAMES ALEXANDER, K.C.B., R.H.A.,

ETC., ETC., ETC.,

THIS FIGHTING TALE OF ANCIENT WAR IS MOST CORDIALLY

Dedicated

BY THE AUTHOR.

P R E F A C E.

IN the following pages I have endeavoured to give young English people of the Victorian age some idea of the life of their forefathers in the brave days of old, by stringing, as it were, on the thread of a personal narrative, a series of stirring anecdotes, culled from genuine Scandinavian sources.

None of the incidents, therefore, are original with me, although occasionally changed, and ascribed to fictitious personages to suit the requirements of the tale. The student of Scandinavian history will recognise many of his old acquaintances pressed somewhat unceremoniously into the service of this little book.

My chief authorities have been : Mallet's Northern Antiquities, Grundtvig's edition of the Elder Edda, Thorlief Jonsson's edition of Sturleison's Edda, the Frithioff's Saga of Esais Tegnér, which I have translated from the Swedish for use in this work, and a collection by the eminent philologist Möbius of fine old Icelandic tales and legends.

The English part of the story is drawn from the following sources : Sharon Turner's History of the Anglo-Saxons, Dr. Paul's Life of Alfred, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and Asser's Biography of Alfred. I have also gained a little insight into the character of Alfred by the careful study of his translation into Anglo-Saxon (which he calls *English*) of the works of Boethius and Orosius, which are so interspersed with matter of his own as to have acquired the interest of original works.

A considerable difficulty presented itself to me in rendering the names of our *dramatis personæ* to the youthful

English mind. To change the orthography of some of them, as I have done, will be held a heinous offence by pure Scandinavians: but what would an English boy, without previous acquaintance with the Scandinavian system of orthography, have made of *Jarl Hjalmar*? These words are pronounced as I have written them, *Yarl Yalmar*, and therefore I have written them so. In the name of our hero, "Hakon," I have introduced an *h* to avoid the certainty of his being called *Hay-kon*.

I can hardly hope that this little effort of mine will have much effect in awakening an interest in the grand fore-fathers of our race, from whom we inherit so many good and sterling qualities. But it would be a source of intense gratification to me if it should prove of some use in that direction. English boys, as a rule, are too open and straightforward to feel any pleasure in the stories of the deities of Olympus. If they must have mythology, they will find the myths of their own race far less objectionable than those of Greece and Rome, and they have besides the advantage of appealing directly to their own Teutonic impulses.

To any of my readers who may become interested in these old-world stories (having in them the origin of most of our thoughts and customs at the present day) I shall be happy to supply any information in my power as to the best means of improving their knowledge on this subject.

J. F. H.

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THE CHAMPION OF ODIN;

OR,

VIKING LIFE IN THE DAYS OF OLD.

CHAPTER I.

HOW YARL ATTLE THE SEA-WOLF VISITED FRAMNESS.

HURRAH for the North ! Hurrah for the land of our own real undoubted ancestors ! Let us (as true descendants of those Scandinavian Vikings who won this fair island for us fourteen hundred years ago and founded our glorious Empire of the Sea) go back to the times of our forefathers and breathe a little of the fresh air of the pure, clear North !

But we must not think of the North as a land of frost and snow exclusively, for though frost and snow, aye ! and tempest and storm, too, have their dwelling there, and, like everything Scandinavian, are thoroughly in earnest when in action, there is yet a very "*sunny*" side to the picture.

No summer is so lovely as a Norwegian summer. Fancy the splendour of the eve of Baldur (now called St. John's), when the sun does not set, but describes a complete circle in the heavens ! Hence the viking boast, that the sun never sets in the land of his birth ! Strange that we, descendants of those very vikings,

should boast in the same way, but with a somewhat different sense, that the sun never sets on the English flag.

We are not going quite so far to the northward, however, as Torneå, where this phenomenon is seen ; we are about to introduce two shepherd boys keeping their flock on the table-land of a promontory called Framness, in Sweden. This table-land affords food to the herds, while the more sheltered plains below are tilled and cultivated to produce the corn and rye for the food of man.

The youthful shepherds are respectively of the ages of twelve and thirteen, very tall for their years, and very stout and muscular.

It is a fearfully hot day. The Baltic, reflecting the blue of the sky in its own deep waters, seems, in its calm and tranquil state, as though, like our two young shepherds, it were too much oppressed with heat to be capable of exertion, and the distant ripple on the beach below sounds like the sigh of oppression.

The boys are very lightly clad. They wear trousers of a sort of striped calico, something like our "bed-ticking" in pattern, but very much thinner. Over these a white calico garment, answering the double purpose of shirt and tunic, is worn, and this is secured round the waist by a cord.

The forms of these two boys are quite of the Scandinavian type. Square shoulders, broad chests, massive foreheads, bluc eyes, as clear and pure as the heaven above them ; long golden hair, bright in the sun. That is a sufficient description. To this, however, may be added a look of daring that would have done honour to a modern life-guardsman.

The boys are lying idle as the water which they

are watching with that peculiar fascination that all boys understand. They are listening to the voices of the daughters of Ægir (god of the sea), as they sing in whispers on the beach, "Come to the sea, come to the sea ; come ! come ! come !"

"Shameful life, Orm, here to rest looking after these stupid sheep. How I hate them ! When I hear their hateful baa ! baa ! baa ! I feel inclined to fling the brutes down the precipice into the Baltic ! but that would be a noble death, worthy of a warrior and son of Odin."

"Aye, truly, Hahkon ! I am as sick of the brutes as thou art ; but as to giving them a warrior's grave, no, no ! I would stone them to death, and cover their bodies with stones like nithings* and cowards !"

"Even that would be too good for them, for nithings and cowards are, after all, men, and these are only brutes ; ugh ! and *such* brutes !" said Hahkon, flinging a large piece of stone at the head of a stupid-looking old ram, which, however, luckily for the animal, missed.

Orm laughed at Hahkon's want of skill, and taking up a smaller pebble flung it with unerring aim at the animal, which shook its head and galloped off, followed by the rest. This event roused the two young herdsmen, who, aided by their dogs, had some trouble in getting the flock into anything like order again.

Then the two boys sat down on the grass and began trying which of the two could fling a stone the farther without rising from the sitting posture in which they were resting. To avoid the annoyance of seeing the stones fall over into the Baltic, as they

* Nithing means a person *below* contempt.

began to do, the boys faced round and began throwing stones inland, sending them over the backs of the flock to a very considerable distance. At last they both rose as by one consent, and commenced throwing the stones from a standing posture, which, of course, gave them more power. It has been said that the pasture was on a table-land inaccessible from the sea, but on the shore side there was a natural fissure in the rocks by which descent to the lowlands was easy. Towards this fissure the stones were now flung, and at last they really reached it, vanishing over its side. Proud of this mighty cast, the boys vied with each other in flinging their missiles, when suddenly a gruff voice exclaimed :

“ By the hammer of Thor! the boys are mad. Stop your hands, you black elves of the lower world! will ye? ”

But it was inaudible to the boys, as the wind came from the sea, and the new comer was some way inland already, so that his voice would have been much weakened by the distance if they could have heard him at all. They continued their sport, becoming more excited than before, until a tall gaunt man emerged from the gully which led to the plains below. He was clad like the boys in a linen frock or shirt, with trousers of the same; a stout cudgel was in his hand, which he brandished savagely in the direction of the young shepherds, who, however, fled in dismay at his approach. The man, whose age was considerably past the prime of life, was almost as active as the boys notwithstanding, and, taking advantage of an impediment to their flight, in the shape of a smaller fissure in the earth, which compelled them to turn to the left and run along its

brink, he cut off their retreat altogether, and, taking a straight line, the chord of the arc they were describing, he came up with them pretty fresh. Swaying his cudgel, he knocked Orm down out of hand, to be dealt with subsequently; and in the meantime commenced giving Hahkon a thrashing that would have broken all the bones in any modern boy's skin, and reduced him to a pulp afterwards. The results of the stone throwing were very evident in the raised bumps on the man's head and the cut in his cheek from which the blood was freely flowing, but the more serious effects on his temper were very soon painfully evident to the boys. Holding Hahkon in his left hand, by the collar of his torn shirt, Hunferth was continuing the castigation of the almost senseless boy, when he himself was seized in the powerful grasp of some unexpected assailant, who hurled him heavily to the ground, exclaiming as he did so :

"Nithing! wouldst thou kill the boy? Poor fellow! It is right and fitting to chastise a lad, but, by the Raven of Odin, this is not chastisement, this is murder! Lie still, cur!" he added, kicking the fallen man furiously in the ribs as he lay, "or by all the gods in Valhalla!—Ah, wouldst thou?" This parenthesis had reference to an effort on the part of the man with the cudgel to rise, which was rendered impossible by a swinging kick from the foot of his assailant, who now turned to Orm, perceiving that this young Norseman had picked himself up, and was enjoying Hunferth's discomfiture.

"Is this boy the son of yon old rascal?" demanded the new comer.

"Odin forbid," quoth Orm. "We both keep flocks under Hunferth, in the service of Halfdan the Grim."

"Whose son is the boy?"

"He is the son of Yoms, the son of Thurs the big. Yoms was drowned at sea in a viking raid, and Hahkon has been sent to Hunferth to be taught the art of keeping flocks and herds, and to conduct himself as the retainer of a rich yarl should." The proud yarl* smiled.

"And who art thou?" he said.

"I am Orm, the son of Svend, who was the son of Rolph the Rover."

"Is thy father living?"

"No; he went to Rana [goddess of the sea] with Yoms, in the same war ship. They were both in the service of Helgé of the Golden Helm, who owned the island of Oesel."

"He was my uncle," said the stranger, "and carried a stout heart and a hard fist, did Helgé! But what! are ye fearful of the boiling waves that ye, strapping youths that ye are, remain on shore when the game of Hilda [goddess of war] is playing on the surface of the deep?"

"No, indeed," said Orm; "I would gladly win glory, but my mother is poor, and next summer I am to receive pay for my labour, therefore I remain and toil."

"It is a noble answer," replied the stranger; "but see, the man whom thou callest Hunferth shows signs of life! Get up, thou dog! and hear this; if thou give not immediately thy word, sworn by Odin, *on my sword*, not to lay hands on the lads again for the space of twelve months from this time, nor to allow any of the herdsmen to strike or otherwise annoy

* Yarl was the highest title of the Scandinavian nobility after the king. It is the same word as our earl, which was formerly pronounced yarl.

these boys, I plunge the sword into thy wretched old body and kick it over into the sea! Wilt swear?"

"I needs must swear upon such compulsion."

"Aye! but shouldst thou break the oath, I will have sure and certain knowledge of every thing that takes place on this part of the coast; and next spring, when the chains of the streams are loosened and they bound headlong to the sea, then I shall come again, and if I find the boys not well and happy, thy barns shall burn, thy herds shall die, and thou thyself shalt miserably perish with all thy kith and kin."

"But, noble sir," cried Orm, "Hunferth is but a 'Bondé' in the service of our Yarl, and though not poor, his flocks and herds would not take up much time in slaughter."

"And who art thou?" cried the elder man, now risen to his full height, "who wouldst force this oath from me? I am unarmed; thou hast thy sword; thy victory is easy! But, by Thor! had I a sword, then had we tried, edge to edge and point to point, which of the twain should yield. Nithing! to force an unarmed man!"

"Be not too forward with thy tongue, good Hunferth! Thou art a nithing, seeing thou couldst assault an unarmed boy in such outrageous guise. It was not mere correction of a fault, it was as foul a deed of petty revenge as ever man could see or coward do! But still, I like thy speech, and as I struck thee down thou hast some right to satisfaction. Go, fetch thy sword, I will await thee. Bring thou a friend as witness that all is fair in this our deadly meeting. As for my name, men call me Attlé Sigurdson the Sea-Wolf!"

The Icelandic saga, from which our history is taken, here gives a glowing and almost comic description of the fright caused by these words. Attlé the "Sea-Wolf" was as well known in those days as Paul Jones was in the last century. The description given of him is nearly as follows :

He was more than six feet high, of a commanding presence and noble mien ; in fact, he was descended from a line of Norwegian kings, "and the blood of Odin was in his veins." His hair was the colour of burnished gold, and rolled in yellow waves to his brawny shoulders. He wore, generally, a blue tunic edged with gold which reached below his knee ; his legs were encased in long trousers of linen bound below the knee with the cross gartering common to all the Scandinavians and the English. Well-made shoes of untanned goat's hide clothed his feet. His head was defended by a leathern cap surmounted by an ornament resembling the comb of the game-cock. This was produced by allowing the leather of the cap, (which was made in two parts sewn together) to project and then to be cut into the comb-like crest. This cap was dyed a dark blue, the comb was as red as its prototype. But what really distinguished the dress of the burly sailor-like form before us, was a broad band of gold worn round the cap, and, by means of a number of little holes for the thread to pass through, securely fastened to the cap itself. The viking wore no armour whatever, not even a shield. He carried his sword in a richly ornamented belt or baldric ; on his bare arms he wore a quantity of huge gold bracelets, while round his neck glittered a silver-gilt torque, or necklace, very similar to those which may be seen at the British Museum.

Hahkon had sufficiently recovered from his unmerciful thrashing to stand up and take an active interest in what was going on, and he surveyed with keen delight the gorgeous trappings of his stout ally.

"If thou art Attlé the Sea-Wolf in very deed, I do not grudge my drubbing to have speech with thee. I would that I were old enough to be thy second in the 'duel ;' but, firstly, I am too young; secondly, thou hast no shield for me to hold; and thirdly, I have no sword to avenge thee shouldst thou fall!"

"Bravely spoken, Hahkon, my friend! As for thy age, that will increase more than is pleasant, I can tell thee. A shield I shall not need; my blade is sword and shield in one glorious weapon. And for thy third trouble, I will give thee a rare good blade if thou wilt join my band."

"That I will cheerily," answered Hahkon, "but I must not leave my foster-brother, Orm. Alone he would lose his joyful mood, and we are such true brothers as only the North can boast. If thou wilt take Orm, I go too; if not, I remain."

"I like thee more and more, friend Hahkon, and when the spring time opens the floodgates of the billows, I will come again, and bear thee and thy brother far from this irksome spot."

At this moment the elder shepherd, whom we have called Hunferth, appeared above the edge of the gully from which he had first emerged. He was armed, that is to say, he wore a helmet of leather, with an iron ring round the lower part corresponding to the gold band worn by the Sea-Wolf. To this two half rings placed at right angles were fixed so as to guard the head, much as an old-fashioned broad-sword guard protected the hand not very long ago.

He wore no other armour, but carried over his shoulder a tremendous specimen of the genus sword, so large and so heavy as to call up a smile on Attlé's face. Another peasant accompanied Hunferth, bearing a second shield, which, like that carried by Hunferth, was covered with the skin of the white goat.

When the two approached, Attlé observed, "I see thou hast brought me a shield, my friend; but it was a needless kindness, though I thank thee all the same. Besides, I cannot fight behind a *white shield*, having won my eagle's wings long since, and therefore bear a gold-bound shield, covered with grey wolf's hide of my own killing. Keep thou thy shield; for me my blade will serve my turn. And who art thou" (this was directed to the second new comer), "thou who wilt play second to both parties?"

"I am Brand, the steward, the son of Glum."

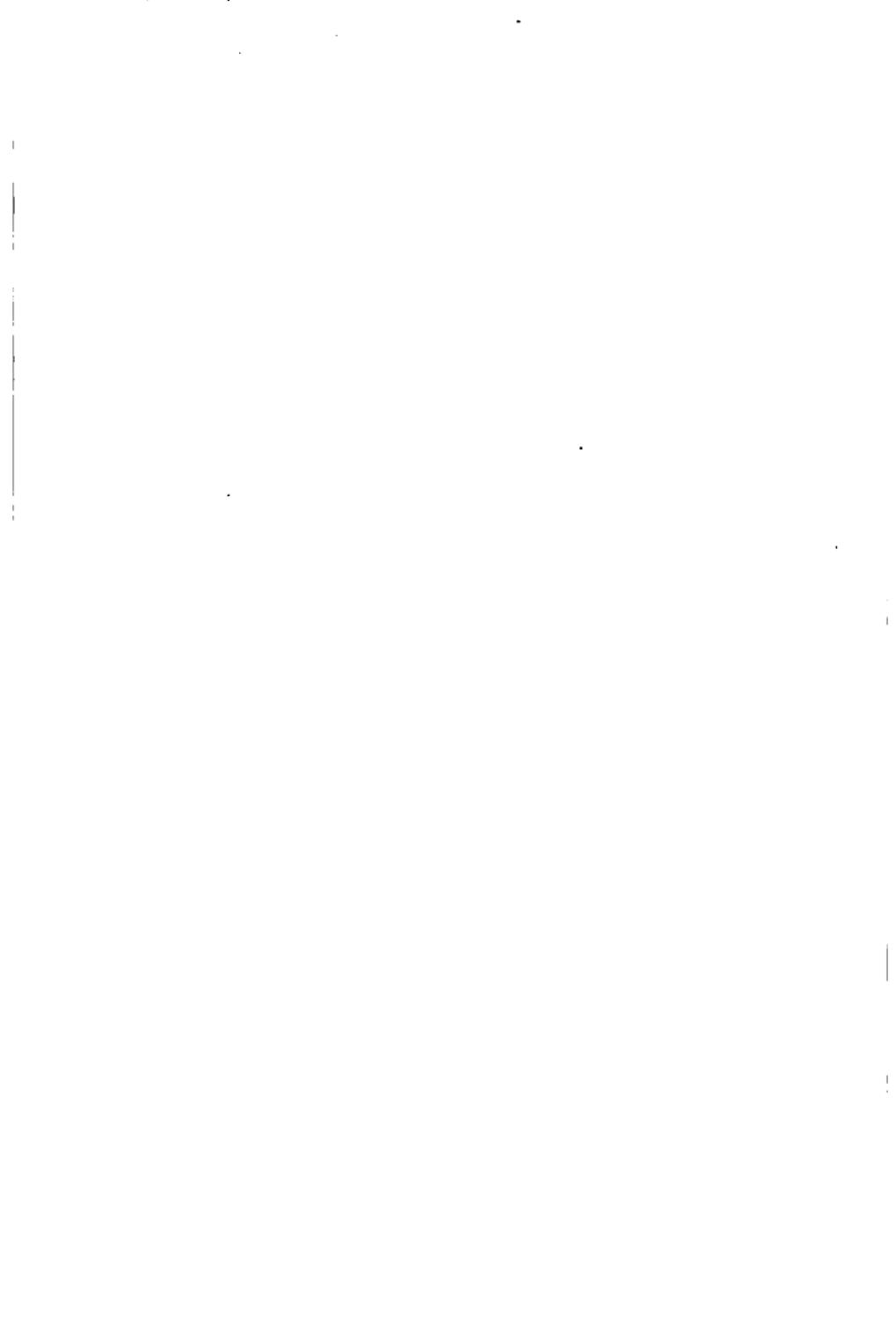
"Good! thou shalt bear witness that this churl has sworn an oath never to touch these boys in the way of punishment. Hast thou so sworn or not, friend Hunferth?"

"Yes, I have sworn, and I will keep my vow."

"Thy vow will be kept, I know, as far as thine own powers are concerned. But thou hast sworn never to cause them to suffer punishment at other hands than thine. Hast thou forgotten?"

"No, I have not forgotten, and what I have sworn I will perform; my word is as good as thine!"

"How! base hind! Because of my great courtesy I have granted thee the honour of measuring swords with me, dost thou presume to make the least comparison between thy wretched self and me? Draw and defend thyself."





"HE BROUGHT THE CUDGEL DOWN UPON THE PEASANT'S HEAD." —

Saying these words, Attlé rushed forward, and picking up the cudgel which Hunferth had used to belabour the boys, flung his sword away, and attacked the peasant with the staff, armed though he was with sword and shield. It was a stout oaken cudgel, as the state of poor Hahkon's bones could testify, and in Attlé's hands it was no mean weapon, for with a dexterous blow, the result of years of practice, he brought it down upon the peasant's wrist, so that the hand hung powerless by his side, while his weapon flew some six yards off from the shock of the blow.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Attlé, "now, friend Hunferth, thou hast had thy wish. Ay, and more! for not only wert thou armed with sword and shield, but I was defenceless save this cudgel; and now I mean to give thee the same treatment that thou hast given this poor lad."

Now Hunferth was a tall strong man, and with his left hand he set about the task of self-defence. The shield was useless, so he flung it away, and dashed at the viking like a wolf himself. But Attlé gave him a tremendous blow across the body, that fractured all the ribs with which it came in contact; then drawing himself deftly back, he brought the cudgel down upon the peasant's head with such an awful crash that skull and staff were shattered by the blow. Down sank the peasant to the earth and never spoke again. Brand and the boys stood staring in stupid astonishment at this extraordinary combat, and its fatal termination. Attlé kicked the dead peasant with his foot, and turning to the wondering lads exclaimed:

"Now he will keep his oath! Boys, ye are well revenged for that last thrashing that he gave you."

Brand, thou wert brought to see fair play ! Has he not had it ? ”

“ Hardly so, methinks. How could a shepherd match himself against so grim a champion ? Hadst thou been quite unarmed, and he in chain mail armour, and armed with the double-headed Danish axe, he would have been no match for thee, therefore the battle was *not* quite so fair as thou wouldest have it thought. The berserk with his bare hands is more than a match for the armed men of the south ; and thou, a man of war, art more than all our peasants put together.”

“ Thou art right, friend Brand ; it is a lesson for me not to praise myself. Here is thy payment *for the lesson.* ” Here he drew off one of his arm-rings, saying, “ Wear this for my sake.” Then addressing the boys he said, “ Ye are friends and foster-brothers. If when the spring time comes ye are still willing to join my band, why, I will take you. Now farewell. My dragon lies at anchor in the creek beyond, and I must go on board. Farewell till spring ! ”

He was gone, and it seemed to the boys as though his presence had been the result of a dream. He vanished like a vision as he had come. Forgotten was the smart of the terrible drubbing Hahkon had received. When he hurried to the gully up which the viking had come, the boy’s whole soul was, as it were, engrossed in the heroic figure of the man. Nor was the effect on Orm’s mind much less than that produced on Hahkon’s. It was like a revelation to them from a higher world ! The undefined longings which they had hitherto felt seemed to take corporate form in the figure of their champion. Without a word to each other, without a glance at their former

tyrant, the two lads hurried on to the spot where the viking had disappeared, but he seemed to have sunk into the earth, and was nowhere to be seen.

Hastening down the fissure in the rock, the boys at last came to the lower plains, rich in forest and in corn fields. Beyond the huge pine forest, which bordered the domain of Halfdan the Grim, was an open plain leading down to the sea, and here the view was very beautiful. The surface of the water was calm, and half-way between the beach and a distant island, which looked like a cloud on the horizon, lay the "dragon," or war ship of the viking, glittering in the sun, whose rays were glinted back from polished bronze and gilded ornaments all over and around the dreaded bark. A little boat, not much more than a canoe, was pushing from the shore, in the stern of which sat Attlé the Sea-Wolf, bearing in his hand an oar with which he steered, while a stout oarsman pulled. Very soon the side of the vessel was reached, and though the boys could see nothing of his motions, the viking had climbed on board by means of a rope hanging carelessly over the side. He was rapidly followed by his companion. The sail was cast loose, and sheeted home, the halyards having been hauled well taut. There was a light breeze from the land, and the stately dragon, leaning gently over, sailed away to seek provisions elsewhere than on the land of a friendly yarl.

The boys had followed to the shore, and now stood watching the graceful motions of the ship under weigh, slightly, but very slightly, heeling over as the light breeze filled the large lug-sail. What boy is there (worth the name of a boy) whose heart does not swell with delight at the sight of a well-sailed ship

going with a gentle breeze over the surface of the "dark blue sea"?

"Ah!" said Hahkon, "that is something like a life! To guide the motions of a glorious ship, full of warriors brave as Thor and wise as Odin! How wretched is our lot, good Orm! What have we to guide but the motions of yon stupid flock? Compare our fate with that of Attlé the Sea-Wolf! Look at the beings which he commands, and the brutes we have to watch!"

"Well, he has done us some good," said Orm, "in ridding us of our enemy, old Hunferth; who, by-the-by, showed skill and courage in confronting him. Poor old fellow! I did not think he was so brave!"

"But what will Halfdan the Grim say to us when he learns that Hunferth is slain, and that through us, though indirectly? I think it were well for us to fly at once, before he hears the news."

"Whither should we fly? Why should we fly? He fell in combat, as old Brand can bear witness. We never urged him on to fight, and never asked the Sea-Wolf to take up our cause."

"Yes, it would be folly to fly," said Hahkon, "and cowardly as well. For us who yearn for the bold life of the viking, flight would be shameful. But then our enemies are men, and we are only boys! What can we do in self-defence? If they beat us we must bear it; if they kill us we must die!"

"No doubt about the last part of the statement; but I greatly doubt that we have a right to bear over-punishment," said Orm; "and if thou wert not half-dead with the brutal treatment thou hast met with, thou wouldest not croak, Hahkon. It is most unlike thee!"

"Right, Orm ; thou art always my best friend. I am a little sore from that fellow's rough handling, but, never mind, I shall be all right anon."

The boys now pressed forward to the beach, and in a few moments, for their scanty clothing rendered the operation of undressing no elaborate work of time, they were sporting in the waves like two dolphins at play. Oh, how they rolled and tumbled in the water ! No element seems so full of pleasure to man as that. The delight of a strong swimmer borne along upon that very element which would be the grave of less resolute hearts, less hardy frames, is only to be appreciated by the brave.

Well refreshed with their swim, and thinking marvellously little about the shepherd slain above them on the rocks, the boys resumed their scant attire, and soon had reached the spot where Hunferth lost his life.

And here an unexpected scene of bustle met their gaze. The place which but so short a time ago was like a wilderness for calm and quiet, where no sign of life was evident save that given by the browsing sheep, was now occupied by armed men, though not fully armed for war.

Foremost in the group of champions was the well-known King Halfdan the Grim, to whom the land belonged. He was accompanied by about twenty of his military followers, who were standing round the dead body of the fallen Hunferth. The champions had formed a ring round the dead man, and near him was standing Brand, who, as it seemed, had just finished some speech or explanation to his chief, which, as we know all the circumstances of the quarrel, we need not repeat. King Halfdan seemed to

be in high wrath when the boys approached, and as they emerged from the gorge or gully down which they had to run to see the viking put to sea, the yarl exclaimed, "Yonder is the cub who has caused all our trouble! Come hither, boy; what is the truth of all this quarrel? Tell the truth, like a Northman, boldly, or thou shalt be flayed alive!"

The swim in the Baltic had done Hahkon all the good imaginable. He recovered his usual daring independence, and fronted King Halfdan with bold confidence.

"I do not come of a lying race, King," said the boy; "and though my father was neither yarl nor king, his name is known all through the North for brave deeds and truthful words!"

"Prate not, but say thy say. Tell us the whole story of the squabble."

"It was shortly thus: I and Orm were flinging stones, when Hunferth came up the gorge. We could not see him, and the stones struck him as he came up. In anger he beat me until I lost all knowledge of what was being done. When I came to myself I found a strong man with a comb-ed cap standing over Hunferth, whom he had thrown down to rescue me. Hunferth demanded combat, which the warrior allowed, but because Hunferth was a churl, he (the warrior) would not use his sword, but struck him with the very cudgel that had been used on me, allowing Hunferth still to use the sword that Brand had brought."

"That was right noble in the warrior; but why did he come to Framness?"

"He came to carry off some sheep and bullocks for his ship, but finding the land belonged to Halfdan, he

said he was related in some way with that prince, and that he would not plunder his goods, not from fear of his arms, but from love of the true viking courtesy. Orm heard him say the words."

"Let us see the wounds."

Hereupon Hahkon threw off his tunic or *skiorta*, and showed such a fearful mass of bruises and thick wales of flesh caused by the shepherd's blows, that Halfdan cried, "Enough, boy; thou hast suffered most unjustly. Henceforth thy trade shall be as mine, the glorious trade of war. Leave the poor sheep to graze at will. Come to the Burg, where Nils the gate-ward shall teach thee thy weapons, and when the time comes thou shalt help him at his work."

"Thanks, King Halfdan! Nothing could please my heart more than to learn the use of arms. But, my foster-brother Orm, may he come with me? Without him, life were very sad to me!"

"Orm has said nothing, and I think it over-bold in thee to seek a way for making terms with me. Another would have jumped for joy to be in Halfdan's train."

"Do not be angry with my brother Hahkon," pleaded Orm, "I fain would be with him and share his toils and danger, but my mother must not want, and soon I shall be able to earn her bread enough, either as shepherd, goat-herd, or what else men please to give me as a calling. I care not in the least so that my mother has enough to end her days in peace!"

"Ha!" said Halfdan, "that is nobly said. Thy speech is free, boy! But speech *should* be free in the North. Where else, if not? Where dwells thy mother?"

"She dwells in the smallest of the huts among the fisher's cottages on the shore of the Disar-fiord."

"To-morrow I shall come to visit her and talk this matter over!"

"Right welcome shalt thou be, King Halfdan," answered the boy with as much ease and politeness as though he were himself another king about to receive a visit from an equal. Yet there was no boasted assumption, no vulgar ostentation of equality, nor the least tinge of the silly affectation which in later times would have led the peasant to declare that his humble roof was not good enough to receive a powerful superior. There was none of that nonsense amongst the free spirits of the hardy North in those bygone days.

The party now proceeded to decide on what kind of action should be taken with the dead body. The shepherd had fallen in fight against a renowned warrior, and he had died sword in hand, circumstances which appeared to entitle him to the distinction of a warrior's grave. On the other hand, he had been slain with a cudgel like a beaten hound, so that he might only claim the burial of the ordinary träll, or thrall, who was, like the Russian serf not fifty years ago, considered as part and parcel of the soil on which he was born. As the opinions of the champions were divided, the king at last decided that the remains should be buried in the peasant's burial-ground, but that they should have the honour of a small mound raised over them; and further, that the dead man should be buried with the sword by his side with which he had attacked the viking.

"Such is my will," said the king. "If Attlé deemed him worthy to meet him in combat, far be it

from me to deny him a warrior's grave. As to cause of quarrel with Attlé, I see none. He was welcome to land here or elsewhere on this shore, and that he saved the boy from undue punishment I am glad. That he slew Hunferth was a likely chance, and I think we owe him thanks for courtesy in granting him the combat."

Then directing the peasants to carry the body to their own ground, and giving orders for the mound that should be raised over Hunferth, Halfdan withdrew.

"That is a right noble master!" quoth Orm.

"True," said Hahkon; "but what are we to say to Attlé the Viking? He will return with the spring, and I am bound by every tie to Halfdan."

"And I, by still stronger ties, to my mother. No, Hahkon, we cannot follow him. Thou canst not desert thy lord, nor can I my mother."

"He will think us right churlish knaves!"

"What does it matter what he thinks? If we do right in the eyes of Allfather, we can afford to care full little for the thoughts of men. I long to follow the Viking path over the sea, on the road where there are no stones, on the road where the big whales sport in perfect freedom, on the trackless path of the brave! But I am too proud to *steal*. And I would not steal even glory! And to leave my mother to poverty and deep distress, that were a nithing deed. I hold that such as 'run away to sea' are little more than cowards, after all. I will run away from nothing. Fate is fixed, we cannot fly its doom, and he who seeks to fly is nithing. We must face the foe and fate."

"Orm, thou art bold and open, just as a boy should be. Right glad am I to have thee for my brother!"

Thy counsel is always of the best. And when Yarl Attlé comes, I shall not fear to front him if thou art on my side!"

"Nonsense! A man must be guided by his own sense of right and wrong, and not by friends. He who is always swayed by others, is like a willow waved by every wind, and good for nothing but to make baskets of. The strong man is the oak, or ash, of which the lance is made! But see, the sun is lower in the summer sky; it is late, let us now pen the flock, and then seek my poor mother's cot. By Thor! how hungry I am!"

"And my back and sides ache fearfully. She is a skilful leech [doctor], and I warrant me will know some way to ease this pain. I should be glad to have some ease, I can scarce walk. I think my ribs are broken. Nevertheless, I'll join thee in thy work, and when the sheep are penned we will seek thy mother."

"Thou art a brave boy, Hahkon. I know such a beating would have killed most men (say nothing of a boy), and those it had not killed would have been so dispirited they would have lost all heart for work or anything."

The boys then betook themselves to the task of getting the sheep into the fold, which was not fully completed until another long hour was past. They then, accompanied by the dogs, took the path that led to the cliff where the cottages stood, in which the labouring poor were housed, and where the mother of Orm and foster-mother of Hahkon dwelt.

CHAPTER II.

HOW HAHKON AND ORM SLEW A BEAR.

IT was on the other side of the ness or promontory that the little cluster of wooden huts was situated, in one of which the mother of Hahkon's friend, Orm, resided. Brenda, a fine specimen of a Northern woman of the people, was sitting on the bench before the door of her humble dwelling. She was clad in a coarse dress or gown of blue cloth, of a kind much affected by the women of the North, and used even by their Anglo-Saxon sisters in this island. But the curious head-dress of red cloth worked with yellow and white threads, the highly decorated apron, and the somewhat clumsy shoes, were in very different taste to that of our own, more direct, foremothers. The brow of the fine old peasant woman was massive and nearly square. Her hair had remained almost unchanged, for although it had lost the glossy shine of girlish days, which gives a Scandinavian maiden's locks the lustre of burnished gold, she had not exchanged the golden threads for silver. The locks had not lost their yellow colour, but they did not look like gold any longer! She was not fifty years of age, but great physical hardship, severe mental trials, and much sickness had all conspired to do their worst on poor *old* Brenda, as she had come to be called by the peasantry. She was apparently gazing into the clear blue sky, with eyes as blue, but, alas! not so bright, for their light had gone out entirely; Brenda was blind.

"Ye are late, boys," said she, as Orm and

Hahkon approached. "I feel the night has come. Where have ye been? The porridge will be cold, and it is late to milk the cows! I have been anxious, fearing that some evil had befallen ye. But I am glad ye have come; better late than never. Get in, and eat your suppers, and then come and tell me what has happened."

It did not require any great amount of "pressing" to induce two hungry boys to attack the huge bowl of porridge, which was standing on the board waiting for them.

It was a mere hut, built of felled trees placed one on the top of another horizontally, and furnished with a sort of gable roof, covered with thatch. The porch was built out from the wall, and was furnished with two seats. Within was a large square stone in the centre of the floor, on which a wood fire even now was blazing, although the evening, or rather night, was sultry. Above the aperture for the passage of the smoke there was a structure on four legs, supporting a kind of cover to prevent snow and hail and rain from pouring in and extinguishing the fire.

The two boys soon finished their porridge, which they attacked with large wooden spoons. After this they had each a fair portion of boiled goat's flesh, from a large black kettle, or cauldron, which hung over the fire. A horn of mead for each boy finished the meal. They then cleaned up the place, and putting the interior in order, came out to the porch, where they sat down on the seat opposite to that occupied by the blind woman.

"I have obeyed thee, mother, without a word, as a true son should; but I missed the pleasure of feeding thee, which is the best part of the meal in our

hut. Perhaps one of the villagers came to help thee."

"Yes, truly, Helga came in and fed me. She gave me the milk which one of you generally hands me, and she herself boiled a chicken for me, and that deliciously."

"She is a good girl," said Hahkon. "The first prize I take as a viking shall be thine, dear Brenda, and the second shall be for her, so that she shall be a rich girl when she marries Bolli Bollison of Südvik."

"What did I hear?" exclaimed Brenda, in great distress. "Thou a viking! impossible! Who has put such fearful thoughts in such a heart as thine?"

"Attlé the Sea-Wolf has been here to pay our king a visit, but he took no plunder, and he killed old Hunferth, after which he offered to take me to sea with him; but Halfdan promises to take us in his train instead: his wish is that Orm should still be with me. However, King Halfdan will come to thee to-morrow, and talk the matter over."

"Why does King Halfdan want to come to me?"

"Because we cannot answer for ourselves. We cannot leave thee without fitting guard. We cannot join his band without thy leave, nor will we seek to do so. If thou feelest that thy heart is sore, I for one remain, although I hate the sight of sheep, and loathe their ba! ba! ba!"

"Ye are good lads," said Brenda, "and I should be the last to set my foolish will against the wisdom of our king. But," and here she sobbed as though her heart would break, "it would be worse than death to lose you, my dear, my noble boys!"

"Then we remain," quoth Hahkon stoutly. "It were a foul deed to break a mother's heart, and thou art more to me than any mother!"

On these lovely midsummer nights it had been usual for the boys to go out into the front space before the cottage, and there to play the part of warriors, with stout ashen staves for arms. Old Hunferth, though a cruel man in his evil mood, was what was called in far later ages "a good master of fence," and he taught our boys some clever blows and wary guards to match them. He himself could stand no chance against such a redoubted hero as Attlé Sigurdson the Sea-Wolf, yet he was a good swordsman, and a man of wonder with his staff.

But on the night in question neither of the boys cared for their ordinary game. Hahkon was in body very stiff and sore from the beating which he had received, though the remembrance of it had passed away from his mind. Orm was greatly taken up with the new train of thought opened up by the prospect of service in arms, albeit conditional upon the provision that might be made for his mother. The idea was constantly before him that he should serve, and that, in consequence of his bearing arms, Brenda would be better off than ever. Unlike themselves, therefore, the two boys sat on the bench musing, until the blind woman rose and said :

"Boys, it is time to rest; my blessing on you both." The boys left their seat, and knelt to receive it as she continued :

"May Odin in his wisdom guide you, Thor in his valour never leave you, and Baldur the Beautiful, whose brow is the sun, may he give you purity of heart and singleness of purpose! May all the

mighty ones above us unite in showering down their blessings on my boys!"

She then entered the interior of the cabin, the farther portion of which was partitioned off from the main room of the cottage by a thin bulkhead of fir planks. Behind this partition fresh straw was always strewn for Brenda, and the fur-lined cloak that served her as a shield against the cold of winter formed a covering to her couch throughout the year.

"She sees more with her sightless eyes, Orm, than we do with all our boasted sharp sight. I wonder whether the Nornas* speak with her? She looked the picture of a vala [prophetess], as she stood with her dear hands stretched out to us, and with her face turned up to heaven. I wonder what she saw?"

"I know not what she *saw*," said Orm; "I know only what *I felt*! It seemed as though she brought the blessing from on high down into her own good heart, and thence she poured it out on us. My own is overflowing."

Before the door of Scandinavian huts there used to be a pile of wood to serve for firing. Each man or boy who lived in such a hut owned a sharp axe for cutting logs of wood into small pieces for the fire. The boys had brought their axes with them to cut up some logs of wood ready for use on the morrow. But they sat chatting on in the manner we have just indicated, forgetting their usual game at sword and lance (played, of course, with staves), forgetting the wood, and everything but their dreamings of the future, when they were suddenly recalled to earth in a very strange and terrible manner.

* The three Nornas are the three fates : Urda, the past ; Verdandi, the present ; and Skuld, the future.

It has been intimated that the hut in which Brenda lived was the last of the cottages, that is to say, the farthest from the protection of the burg, or hold, of King Halfdan, and it was the nearest to the forest, whence wood was obtained for the "thorpe," or village. Now, the back of the cottage was towards the forest, and the porch towards the sea, over which the glances of the boys were often sent in search of viking ships in the offing. Hahkon raised his head, and was turning his face in that direction, when it met another face just peeping round the porch. It curdled the brave boy's blood for a moment, as it would have done yours, bold young reader, for it was hardly to be called a *face*, being, in fact, the snout of a full-grown young bear!

The light was perfect. It was past midnight, yet every object was distinctly visible, and that was an advantage, because an encounter with a bear in the dark is, from many points of view, objectionable. The first shock being over, Hahkon remembered the axe, and, without taking his eye off the bear, he began to feel for it, but in vain: he forgot that he had placed it in the corner of the porch next to Orm, and farthest from himself. Not finding the axe at once, he whispered to his foster-brother in an anxious, hoarse tone, "Orm! the axe, quick, quick! the axe!" The boy looked up, and seeing the bear now coming bodily into the porch, for a moment lost his presence of mind; but it was only for a moment; he grasped one of the axes and passed it into Hahkon's hand, who seized it hastily, and struck wildly at the bear, intending and hoping to plant a blow with the edge right between the eyes of the monster, but the excitement and sudden shock combined unnerved

his hand, and the blow only irritated the brute, which now advanced on hind legs to seize Hahkon in that final embrace which those who know about bears describe as sufficient for the hunter, effectually curing him of any passion for the chase. But the interval, short as it was, had served Orm as a breathing-time. He came to himself, and, raising his axe, dealt Bruin a blow which made him stagger back, and writhe for an instant with pain. The blood spouted from his nose from the force of the blow, and he turned now all his fury upon his new assailant. Orm met him with a dexterous blow at his nose, thinking it less difficult of dissection than the frontal bone ; but he had nearly paid full dear for this temerity, for the bear now sought with maddened rage to reach him. Hahkon leaped up on to the bench where he had been sitting with Orm ; and as the latter just contrived to elude, for a moment, the too fraternal hug, Hahkon raised his axe high above his head, and this time brought the sharp edge, full and duly, point blank upon the skull, just between the eyes. It was a blow that would have finished an ox, but it did not finish the bear, which, now frantic with pain, tried to seize Hahkon with those iron-like claws which are so deadly. But here Orm's axe came into play, and he contrived to give the animal so sound a cut across the fore-leg as nearly to sever it from his body, while another moment had served to give Hahkon an opportunity of planting a blow with his axe just at the back of Bruin's head, fortunately just at the junction of the spine with the skull. From the position of the boy with reference to the bear, the axe was forced into the spine of the animal, so that the lower corner of the cutting edge entered, and caused

him to leap spasmodically forwards, and drop down dead. The bear fell against the cottage door with such force as to drive it in with a startling crash. Poor Brenda had heard the savage growls, and the brief noise of the fray had paralysed her with fear and horror, so that she could not utter a sound ; but the new fright caused by the bursting in of the door seemed to loosen the strings of speech, and she uttered a most appalling shriek, which alarmed the boys even more than the bear had done. The terrified scream alarmed the nearest cottagers, who flung what clothing they could lay their hands on over them, and armed with axes, lances, clubs, or what not, hurried to the aid of widow Brenda. But it was too late for the peasants to lay claim to any share in the death of the bear ; and they were all, to do them justice, loud in their praises of the two heroes who had vanquished the grizzly foe, quite unaided by any "grown-up" allies.

The good widow, to whom the light of Christianity had not yet penetrated, gave thanks to Baldur for the victory : so true it is that the human heart feels always that there is a higher power to whom thanks are due for all the good that happens to us. The villagers were uproarious. They wanted to cut off the monster's head, but Hahkon and Orm stood on the defensive, and declared that, as they had won the victory, to them only belonged the right of disposal of the spoils. A long time they strove with the peasants, and it was not until Brenda came with her almost supernaturally reverend appearance, and entreated her good neighbours to forbear, that they separated. And now the night was gone ; it was day already when the last of the tribe sought the shelter of his own roof from the

rays of the rising sun. Then Orm and Hahkon agreed to watch the carcase each by turns whilst the other slept.

It was still early morning, and many of the labourers and peasants who had seen the bear, came again to gaze upon, and wonder at, the terrible size of the body of the foe. They, in turn, excited the curiosity of those who had not seen it, and a tolerable crowd was gathered around the cottage porch, discussing the wonder that such a monster should have been defeated and slain by two raw boys. Some exclaimed that it was not possible; that men well trained to war would hesitate in attacking such a bear as this. All sorts of opinions were expressed, each more absurd than the other, as to the manner in which the animal ought to have been slain.

Again the widow Brenda appeared at the door and entreated the visitors to disperse. "The boys," she said, "have had but scant repose after a most fatiguing day; and then," she continued, "King Halfdan was coming to see them that very morning, and she was loth, that she was, that he should think his people idle wonder-mongers, neglecting their work for stupid curiosity!"

This news was received with various expressions of feeling by the throng. Some said it could never be that proud King Halfdan should visit such a cot, and the clever widow had invented the tale to get rid of them.

"I take shame," cried old Erick Jensson, "that we should charge the good wife with falsehood. It is not in her to tell a lie; and if she says the king is coming, then by the Raven of Odin we had better quit before he finds us idle!"

There was so much wisdom in this suggestion that it was immediately acted upon, and our boys, after a short discussion with Brenda, agreed to take the flocks to the pasture as usual, and then that one of them should return to meet Halfdan, leaving the flock in charge of the other, who was to relieve him at noon. It was arranged, further, that two old peasants who lived in a cottage some distance off should be requested to come and watch the carcase of the bear, to keep off the dogs with their staves, and help Brenda with their eyes. But before the boys had quite finished their breakfast the quick ears of the blind old woman caught the sound of an advancing troop. She rose and called her "sons" to leave their meal and come to meet the king. Short time served the lads to remove all traces of their breakfast from the rough board within. Their hair was neatly combed and very clean; their northern love of water taught them to bathe the first thing in the morning, and at night when work was done. So when Halfdan reached their hut, he found the two boys clean, and bright, and ready, standing just in front of the humble dwelling on each side of the blind woman, whose bearing showed no trace of the poverty to which she was exposed. Behind this group lay the carcase of the bear, and when the train had come within sight of the cottage, great was the uproar amongst the dogs, for they sniffed the carrion in the wind, and knew that the dead foe was harmless. The horses all were restive, for it is a well-known fact that they can also scent the bear, and tremble in agony of fear whenever they do so. The warriors strove to calm their steeds and soothe them with their voices. And so the train came on.

King Halfdan carried on his wrist a lovely bird, a

well-trained falcon for the chase, for it was then the privilege of high nobility alone to carry birds like this. The falk, or falcon, was so trained that when it saw a bird considered "game" it would rise on high, and, flying above it in narrowing circles, would at last swoop down and, darting on it from above, kill it with a blow. The whistle of the huntsman was enough to lure the bird from his prey, for hearing this he would leave his quarry and fly back to the huntsman's wrist. When riding on his master's hand this bird was carried hooded ; that is to say, a cap that covered all his head and eyes was fitted so as to prevent his seeing anything until his master chose to launch him at the prey. This cap was gaily adorned with crimson feathers and silver bells, the jingling of which caused the bird as much delight as it did his master.

When the king came close to the cottage, before which the group of which we have spoken was standing, his horse grew very restive, so that he dismounted, giving his falcon to a younger man who rode beside him on a coal-black steed that seemed as restive as the king's own horse.

"Hold thou my falcon, Yalmar. I will advance on foot. Draw off the train; I will go on alone. Poor blind old Brenda will not frighten *me*, though she may scare the horses!"

The stately leader bounded to the earth, and then stood leaning on his javelin, to watch the retreating train. Two grooms had, at a signal made by their lord, dismounted and waited while he advanced to Brenda, and the train rode away.

"How now, ye shepherds! What have ye there? It seems ye aim at hunting as well as viking fame!"

Who slew yon bear, I wonder? A mighty brute to hunt! Ha! boys!"

By this time many of the dogs, seeing that Halfdan had advanced alone, came after him, and soon commenced a yelling chorus round the hut that angered Halfdan sorely. He chid the animals, and bade the two grooms approach and aid him in stifling their rage. By dint of skill and management the dogs were led away, and with great difficulty made to join the train. Halfdan, whose curiosity was great to know who slew the bear, again began his questions. Hahkon at last replied, "So please you to be seated, I will tell the tale." Thus saying, he produced a three-legged stool or settle from the hut, and placed it for the king some distance from the porch. In a few words he told the story of the bear so modestly that Halfdan was delighted.

"Ye are brave boys," he said; "and what pleases me best is, that neither seeks his own special honour and glory, but each strives to praise the other. Ye are the right stuff to make warriors of. Now comes the question, when shall ye enter my train?"

"That can Hahkon do alone," quoth Orm. "I must watch thy flocks and herds, to earn my mother's bread, for she is blind, and needs my care more than a Norseman's mother generally does."

"Right!" said the king. "Thy courage has been tried, so I have no doubt that thy wish to serve thy mother will be met. Fear naught for her. The Lady Freydisa will take her as a matron for her maidens, and she will be happy to know that her son and foster-son are to be made warriors of, and the boys will be still more glad to know that poverty is at an end for Brenda."

The boys stood erect and proud, and thanked Halfdan in few but hearty words. The leader stepped forward and took the hand of each, saying as he did so, "Thou art of my train."

The old woman fell on her knees and called on all the gods to bless King Halfdan.

"Now," said the warrior, "ye must be at the 'Burg' by noon; a horse shall bear the woman to the 'Hall,' and there the Lady Freydisa will welcome her."

"But yet two questions," said Orm, right bluffly: "Who is to watch thy sheep? Hunferth is dead, and we shall be away. Next, how shall we order the remains of yonder bear?"

"There are other shepherds than Hunferth, and other boys than ye, and they will all be glad to serve me, I trow! As to the bear, ye have slain him, and to you belong the spoils."

"Then, King, be pleased accept the skin and head. The limbs will salt and smoke for dainty winter eating. The other flesh, if thou wilt but allow, we would gladly give to these poor neighbours round, who fain would taste such a feast."

"Be it so, but with this difference. Ye have killed the bear, and have, according to hunter's law, full right to dispose of the carcase. For the skin, I accept it only in trust for you, to be stretched over your shields as soon I hear that ye are counted worthy and fit to carry arms."

"Right earnestly and heartily we thank thee, dread lord King," said Orm; "but must we not first bear shields covered with the white skins of goats or bulls?"

"Such is the custom, boy. But your brave deed

merits a sign. The sign shall be the wearing of the bearskin ye have won before the white was borne. Ha ! say I well, boys ? ”

This question was the result of the overflow of joy which had beamed forth from the faces of the youngsters so glowingly as to be almost comic.

“ The head and jaws I keep as a gift from two retainers entering my service, not as peasants, but as free-born men who hope to be belted knights some day. And now, farewell. My huntsman will be sent to carve yon bear, and gentle grooms will lead your mother to her lady’s bower, and you to Halfdan’s Burg.”

So saying, he strode away, leaving the boys gazing in ecstasy after him. As his departing footsteps died away, the old blind woman exclaimed : “ There goes a tread that shakes the ground, and that tramp is but the beginning ; for the time shall come when the whole earth shall tremble under the feet of the sons of the Champions of Odin ! The sun is rising now in all his glory, flooding the world with light, light that I may not see. May it betoken your paths in glory, though I may never see your arms.”

Then the good Brenda, full of emotion, turned to her hut and entered, leaving the boys alone.

Let us follow the stalwart king as he strides towards his Burg, as he calls it, though it is no easy task to keep up with a warrior so active and of such length of limb.

In very short space he had reached the plain below, and there the train is halted to await his coming. But the effect of fear is still perceptible amongst the horses. The dogs, too, seem in a state of ungovernable excitement. But they bark joyously

at sight of their master, and Yalmar rides forward to greet his lord, whose noble steed, Gangar, he leads by the bridle, and whose falcon he bears on his wrist. When the bold steed sees his master, he arches his graceful neck, pricks his ears, and begins to curvet and prance, and paw the air with his fore-hoofs, until it becomes a task of difficulty for Yalmar to hold him.

Lightly the powerful warrior vaults into the saddle, and lightly bounds the high mettled war-horse beneath him, and away the whole troop flies over the plain in the direction of the "Burg," like a sheaf of arrows discharged from a catapult, or from a party of stout bowmen shooting at a mark.

Very simple, indeed, was the "Burg," or tower, as we now say, using a debased Norman word instead of our own dear English, though that still lives in such names as *Edinburgh*, *Aldermanbury*, *Mayburg*, and others. It was not much of a *tower*, being, in fact, merely a place of safety for women and children in case of attack, and a depository for arms. It was a square building of logs, built like the cottages on the cliffs, only higher and stronger. It had no windows, but there were, on each side, four narrow slits for the admission of light and air, and for the purpose of shooting at an enemy advancing to the attack. It was built on a rising ground, or hill, so as to form a watch-tower to those who stood upon the roof. Below the "Burg" was the Hall, surrounded by numerous side buildings and offices, kitchens and other out-houses, the most important among which was a large house, nearly as big as the Hall itself, divided into certain compartments to afford accommodation for the maidens of the queen. This was called the *Bür*, or *Bower*, and answered to the *gynocœum* of the Greeks.

In the stables sixty war-horses stood "stamping in stall," so we may imagine that the accommodation for such a number of retainers as would correspond to that amount of horse flesh must have been at least *roomy*; for, besides the actual armed champions who rode these "fettered whirlwinds," there was the almost countless train of servitors, churls, thralls, etc., that made up a king's court in those days.

Originally the Scandinavian kings possessed but little power, being in fact little more than chiefs of small clans. They were elected by the people, that is to say, that on the death of a king, his eldest son did not of necessity succeed him, although the choice of a successor had to be confined to the "blood of Odin," or the "race of the *Æsir*," to which the royal family belonged.

In the case of Halfdan, he had been elected to the exclusion of his gloomy brother Helgé, who had taken, in consequence, entirely to sea-roving, and had been killed in a fight with some Norwegian vikings. It was usual for the non-successful candidates for government to go afloat, and either establish colonies, or win riches by what we should call piracy in our more modern phrase.

The love of breaking up a country into small states was the origin of our dividing Britain into so many little kingdoms, when we first came from Scandinavia; and the love of a roving life of stirring adventure at sea is as strong in us now as it was sixteen hundred years ago, when we swept the Romans off the face of the waves which we have ruled ever since.

Helgé and Halfdan were sons of King Belé, who had held court and given judgment, at Framness, for

nearly fifty years. At his death, "Helgé the Black" and "Halfdan the Merry" called a "*Ting*," or general meeting, to elect which of them should be judged most likely to rule to the satisfaction of the district. Helgé was disliked on account of his gloom, so Halfdan was chosen, although he was thought by some too gay of mood to be a good king. Indeed, in the old saga from which this story is taken, King Belé himself, before his death, addressed his two sons thus :

" Be ever firm, King Helgé, but not too stern,
 The sword that cuts the keenest the easier is to turn.
 A king is graced by kindness, as shields with flowers ;
 More good than winter's gloominess yield bright spring showers.

" Thou, Halfdan, joyous spirits all wise men prize,
 But trifling (in a king, too) all men despise.
 Through bitter hops, not honey, is mead worth drinking ;
 In thy sword seek sturdy steel, king ! In play find thinking."

And Halfdan had never forgotten the solemnity of that last warning. He had become, in fact, so stout a warrior, that although light-hearted and bright of mood, men called him now-a-days more frequently "Halfdan the Grim" than "Halfdan the Merry." Yet, in sooth, he was known by both names; the poor, the weak, and the ladies of his little court calling him merry, while stern warriors called him grim ; and, in a word, he had justified the wisdom of the "*Ting*" in choosing him to the exclusion of his brother Helgé.

The court was a bright sight when the king rode in, attended by Yarl Yalmar and his train. The brightness of the gay king's disposition was felt amongst his followers, *but the steel was there all the same.*

It wanted yet some hours of noon, and the time was well filled up by Halfdan, who inspected the military trials of skill between the elder warriors, which were held daily on a plain set apart for that purpose; and then he attended with quite as much interest the sports of the boys and noble youths who had been placed under him to learn the glorious art of war.

He was greeted with a loud hurrah! as he came amongst the boys. To this he replied with a bright smile, saying, "To it, my stalwart friends; an arm ring to him who can throw my boar-spear farthest!"

The hope of this reward rendered all the boys eager. They were, however, too much under discipline to be uproarious about it, and each tried his skill; much laughter being caused by one little golden-haired warrior of ten winters' age, who could not lift the spear, but who begged one of the bigger boys to lift it for him to his shoulder, whence, he said, he was sure he *could throw it*.

"Brave boy!" said the king. "That is the true viking spirit. Be sure thou canst hit the mark, and the strife is nearly thine. By the hammer of Thor! I am half inclined to award thee the ring for thy boldness; but that may not be, for Oloff Fryasson sent the spear farthest. Boys, ye will have two new comrades to-day. Love and cherish them; they are stout and brave, and dear to me."

CHAPTER III.

HOW KING HALFDAN DECLARED WAR.

TIME had passed rapidly. The shepherd boys had fought their way among the youths at the Burg much as boys at our own schools have to fight their way now. Halfdan watched their progress, but took no particular notice of them, more than of the others. They were bold enough to assert themselves, and stout enough to hold their own. The story of the victory over the bear had caused them some trouble, and many fights arose with the bigger boys of this Northern nursery; but the men of the train foretold great things of the youthful "bear-slayers."

King Belé had given orders to be buried on a certain promontory which guarded the bay where the fleet of dragon-ships was moored, and his mound had been constructed to receive him in his armour and full war panoply complete. His horse was buried with him, so was his drinking horn with its mounts of gold. So were all the requirements of a warrior who was sure of a welcome in Valhalla. And though the belief was that he had long since galloped over the burning bridge that leads to everlasting glory, called by men the rainbow, yet there was a solemn feeling amongst those simple people that when great affairs were spoken of, the spirit of the departed king descended to his grave mound, and there he could hear what men debated on earth.

Therefore King Halfdan held his "Ting," or parliament, on King Belé's grave.

He stood in full war panoply, excepting the chain-

mail shirt, or pansar, as it was called in Scandinavia, though the English called it byrnie. He wore a blue tunic bordered with gold, a leathern cap bound with a gold band, and surmounted by two half hoops of gold. This was the "kunnung hielm," or crown of the Scandinavian kings. His sword was sheathed in a scabbard of rich crimson leather, bound over and over with cross bands of gold. His feet were encased in dainty shoes, and the Scandinavian cross gartering was in this case made of strongly gilt leathern straps. Round his linden shield was bound a rim of gold, and upon the hide of the grey wolf stretched as a covering to the shield, thick plates of gold were nailed, which, being cut into long triangular shapes radiating from the centre boss, which also was of gold, formed a sort of golden sun, very dazzling to the enemy. In short, he looked like a golden statue on a grey stone base. Over the whole he wore a blue mantle edged with gold, and from each side of his helmet extended wide the eagle's wings that announced the tried soldier and leader of Odin's warriors.

At his left hand stood Yarl Yalmar and another yarl, both gorgeously clad. At his right stood, clad in white robes, and crowned with garlands of ash with red berries, two of the priests of Odin.

At a spear's length from the "Doom-stone" stood the yarls in a ring upon the mound, armed with sword and shield; then stood a closer ring another spear's length farther down, composed of the free landholders, who held their lands on military service, all armed with sword and shield; while again a spear's length off stood the military peasants. Beyond was the crowd of churls, thralls, and menials that made up the male population.

Halfdan had hung his gold shield on the linden tree planted on his father's grave fifteen years ago, and now he, having finished a speech, which had been received with great applause, was about to resume the golden target, when it was announced to him that messengers had arrived who desired speech with him.

"Let them come, and let their speech be free!"

Three men were permitted to advance through the concentric rings, until they came close to the stone on which Halfdan was standing; there, after meet obeisance, the eldest of the three thus spake:

"King Halfdan Beléson! we come to thee from our lord, King Ring, demanding thy daughter, the Lady Ingeborg, in marriage. It is now two years since his first wife died. She was lovely and good, and has now her seat in Folkvang's halls with the bright goddess who favours her true and faithful sisters, and takes them to everlasting joy. But it is not meet that a throne should be queenless, and therefore, O King Halfdan! our good king sends us to thee greeting, and asking for thy blessing on his union with the Lady Ingeborg."

"Right glad am I," replied Halfdan, "to find such friendship in the heart of Ring, and I thank him heartily for his merry message. But the hand of my daughter is not mine to bestow. Her fate depends upon the people's wish, and not at all on me. Deign to retire to the hall, with stout Yarl Yalmar who will see thee well bestowed. I then will ask the open 'Ting,' upon King Belé's grave, what shall be done with his son's child. Ha! yarls and warriors! champions and freemen! say I well, or no?"

The answer was a clang of the swords against the metal of the shields. The cool fresh autumn

air seemed laughing in the joyous sound of free thought thus uttered by free men. It was a thrilling clangour !

"Ha!" cried the king, "there is more in that sound than all men heard! some of my older friends certainly must have heard the clang of 'Tirfing,' my father's sword, against his sounding shield. Say I sooth, yarls?"

"All men applaud the words of wisdom," said a tall, stout old warrior, standing; "and well I know that Belé acted as thou hast done, when I demanded, forty years ago, thy sister in marriage. Therefore, as thou didst hear the clang of 'Tirfing,' it only shows, what we know already, that thou hast spoken well."

This speech was received with another burst of metallic thunder from the armed throng.

Yarl Yalmar had withdrawn with the messengers from Ring, and now King Halfdan again addressed his "Ting" with the direct question as to whether the application for the hand of the Lady Ingeborg should be entertained or not.

Another stately yarl now presented himself to speak, and thus addressed the assembly.

"King, yarls, and freemen! It is a dreary state of things when men, out of fear of greater might, yield to others in questions of high import, and I ween there is no question of such moment as the welfare of those tender beings committed by the gods to our charge. He who, to save his own skin, would fail in his duty to the holy being we call 'woman,' is nithing, base and coward. I say, that although King Ring is mightier than we, we should not hesitate to say 'NO' to his demand."

Again the "thundering clang of blade-beat buckler

burst." Nor was there a heart amongst that throng that did not beat applause.

Then spake another yarl, a youthful champion, but stout, and well approved in war.

"King Halfdan, yarls of might, men of the North ! The Lady Ingeborg is seventeen winters old. King Ring is a brave and warlike prince, but the snows of many winters hang over his brows. Shall we mate lovely spring with the chilly winter, because, forsooth, he wields a sturdy blade ? I trow not. I, for one, advise that we give not our rosebud to gloomy winter. In proper care, she will unfold the loveliest rose in all the North. But if we give her over to the frost, then stem and leaves and petals are shrouded all in ice, That kills the noble flower, and wrecks a lovely life ! Here is my sword to guard her, and all the champions in my train (albeit not so many as those that serve Yarl Axel) will draw with joy for her ! "

Again the free air drank in the plaudits of free men, and the winds bore the glad sounds aloft.

Then said Yarl Axel :

"I see another train of armed men approaching from the shore. They seek some speech with thee. King Halfdan. Shall we admit them to the king ?"

"It is not courteous to come to us in arms, but we will not be churls. Admit them !"

Then at a sign from Axel the rings opened, and three stalwart warriors, clad in chain armour, ascended the funeral mound. They wore the eagle's pinions on their helmets, and bore sword and spear.

"Whence come ye, champions ?" said the king. "Come ye in peace, or come ye in war ? In either case ye are welcome. Say forth your say, and merrily ; for if your errand should be peace, why

that means fun and feasting, which I love ; and if ye bring us war, why that means glory, honour, clang of shields, and showers of spears, whether on the billows or on land. So, any how, be welcome ! Ha ! say I well, my yarls ? ”

The usual answer was given in the warlike clang of steel, and Halfdan looked proudly at the messengers, as though he said : “ Hear how my war-men speak for me ! Such is the voice I love ! ” But his real words were : “ Now speak out freely ; what want ye here of us ? ”

The foremost warrior thus addressed the king : “ We come in our dragon, anchored in the bay ; from good Yarl Attlé to King Halfdan, greeting.”

“ Attlé the Sea-Wolf ? ” asked the king. “ Then are ye doubly welcome ; first, because a valiant man is always welcome to us, whether he come himself in person, or visit us by messengers chosen for their bravery as fit to represent him ; and, secondly, because we all love brave Yarl Attlé, who is my dear-worth friend. Now, say, what can I do to pleasure him ? ”

“ Yarl Attlé greets King Halfdan in friendly mood by us, and begs him, of his grace, to grant him the two shepherd boys he saw upon the ness when he last came to Framness. He fain would make them warriors to ride with him in arms, to seek adventures on the waves, and warlike deeds on land.”

“ Greatly I thank Yarl Attlé for all his love to me, and gladly would I pleasure him in any lawful way. But those two lads are freemen ; free as the Yarl himself ; free as the air we breathe. I cannot give him freemen as I would hawk or hound. But as for serving in his train, that must be of their choice. I

have admitted them to mine. They pledged their hand to me, and are among my men; but I release them if they choose to serve with Attlé."

"It is a noble answer, good lord King!" exclaimed the foremost warrior. "But Attlé mentioned somewhat of a promise they had made to serve him in his train."

"They could not make a promise when they were shepherd churls. Since your brave Yarl was here, those boys have *slain a bear*. This frees them from their thraldom, being a deed of arms. They since have studied war, and wear the bear skin on their shields. I have admitted them to all the rights of championship, and even now would show them to the king as "champions," with the combed helm and brown shields of the brave! Ha! say I well, my warriors? Hahkon and Orm, stand forth!"

The sentiments thus expressed were so thoroughly Scandinavian, that a perfect storm of applause followed, which was continued when our two young friends were presented to the assembly. They, nothing daunted, gazed proudly round on the armed rings, but never said a word.

They wore leather caps surmounted by a blood-red *comb*, similar to that worn by Baldur's war-bird, the cock; and their wearing it showed that they had been admitted as warriors, although not yet entitled to wear the wide eagle's pinions spreading out on each side of the helm-rings, which had frightened the Romans so "in the brave days of old," long, long before the days of which we write.

They wore white tunics, edged with red; but, instead of white shields, they carried "linden boards" of a circular shape, covered with *bear's skin*, bound

with a rim of steel, and studded with ivory. Their legs were encased in blue trousers, the lower part being bound round with straps of well-dressed leather of a deep red colour, and woven one under the other into a trelliswork. The feet were encased in neatly made boots, or rather shoes, of brown leather. Each bore a lance and a small sword, or dirk ; but not the big battle sword of the older warriors.

"Now," said the king, "these youths, having slain a bear, have a right to warrior treatment. They have grasped my hand in token of fealty; but, as they have pleased the warrior eye of Attlé the Sea-Wolf, I release them from the hand-grip-pledge, if they like better to serve with him. But hear me, champions! They must have full freedom in their choice. If they choose to go with you, they shall have full leave to do so. If they rather stay with me, I pray you beg Yarl Attlé to take the chance in friendship not grudgingly."

Then turning to the boys he said :

"In wonderful short time have ye contrived to win your way so far, and this day I present you to the Ting as 'warriors.' After the Ting, the Lady Freydisa will give you becoming arms, but before ye make your open vow to serve with me, think over what the good Yarl Attlé offers. And if ye choose to serve with him, ye may ; for ye are freemen by the hand-grip-pledge. Go with his messenger if ye list ; I shall not hinder you. Or stay with me."

Then said Hahkon : "Sir King and lord ! Ill be-seems it that untried boys should speak in the Ting of warriors. But we must answer thee. And for myself, and, as I think, for Orm, I answer thankfully to great Yarl Attlé for asking us to join his band. We are in some sense bound to him, though not before

next spring. But still I hold that, having been received by our proper lord and king for warlike service on his land, that binds us more to him ; so that if he permit us, and the heralds will promise that the good Yarl Attlé shall not count it as a slight from us, seeing we have had the choice given us, we will remain with our king Halfdan as his true servitors. Say I well, Orm ? ”

“ Thou speakest as I think. I am the king's.”

The messenger of Yarl Attlé looked uneasy. The boon asked by their lord had been refused, and yet in such a manner as to disarm their anger. Yet were they angry at being unable to report at once to Attlé that the boys were his. They were too well acquainted with northern martial etiquette not to know that Halfdan was more than in the right; that, indeed, he was acting nobly to the boys and quite courteously towards their yarl.

The next day a great solemnity took place in the hall after the mid-day meal, where first the Lady Freydisa, descending from the high bank or dais, called the two champions, Hahkon and Orm, across the fire which was burning high in the centre of the great hall. Opposite her, on the other side of the fire, stood the boys, and as she called them she reached a horn of wine which they were to drink to the healths of Thor, Odin, and Frey, and to King Halfdan. This they did, Hahkon drinking first, adding to the toast the name of Attlé the Sea-Wolf, which seemed to give great pleasure to the messengers from that lord.

Over the flames the queen then reached a massive sword to each, and called them each by name, at which the two boys sprang through the flames, and, with a graceful bow, gave the swords into the hands

of Halldan sitting on his high bank, to show that all they had belonged of right to him. Then the king returned the weapons, saying :

“ Use the sword, but do not abuse it. Take it from my hand, but wear it as thine own. Thus men have power from the gods, but use it as their own. Remember this : Arms are worn by brave men to guard those whose lives are peaceful from harm and scathe. The champion gives his blood to guard the tender woman that nursed his infancy, and to shield the holy valas [priestesses and prophetesses], and to keep the wife who is the joy of his homestead from violence and wrong. Think, then, what a solemn meaning is conveyed in this act when *I give you swords.*”

The warriors, who had been standing during this speech, uttered a low hoarse growl, something like a modern hurrah, but more subdued. Then each held up his horn, and drank health to the newly received warriors. After this, a place at the lower end of the hall was pointed out by the steward, where the shields and arms of the boys were hung against the gorgeous tapestry of the hall.

Then Halldan again arose, and calling the messengers to him who had come from King Ring, he said :

“ Fair sirs, it irks me to deny so good a lord as famous Ring; but after ye had left the Ting yesterday, the marriage of my daughter was discussed by all the assembled throng, for ye must know, as well as I do, that a king’s daughter’s hand depends upon the people’s wish, not on her father’s word. She is not like a peasant maiden whose father gives consent, and she becomes at once the wife of any humble clown.

Well, I have asked my Ting, my counsellors, and priests, who, to a man, say *no*. Last night we offered both falcon and horse on the huge doom-stones on the plain, but the response was always *no*. And I may say that my warriors think the Lady Ingeborg too young, and good King Ring too old. We pray you of your courtesy to tarry here a space, make merry with our warriors and drink of the rich brown mead."

But the messengers were angry, and answered in a huff that they would return home and tell their master how they had been insulted by pretended courtesy, and he, King Ring, called "Grey Beard."

"I never called King Ring 'Grey Beard,'" Halfdan cried. "But say what ye list, it is the same to me."

In bitter mood the messengers now left the Hall, and the king looking after them said :

"Yarls and warriors, I fancy the grey beard will call for a red comb." This was a joke in its way, because the comb on the helmet, answering to the crest of modern times, was a sign of a man's being a warrior. The use of this ornament occasioned the word *kæmbri* (comb-wearers) to be applied by the Romans to all the Teutons. The word champion is directly derived from it, and means comb-wearer.

The king's pleasantry was received with laughter and much applause. The words referred, of course, to war with King Ring, but it is not known generally that the red comb of the cock was the sign of war. The bird was originally sacred to Odin, but on account of its service to Baldur was subsequently transferred to him. In Icelandic, Swedish, Danish, and English, the same word comb, or camb, is applied

to the crest of the war-bird, and to the instrument with which the hair is kept in order.

Halfdan now called the messengers of Yarl Attlé to him. To these men he gave rich presents of gold bracelets and arms, begging them to greet well the Yarl from him, to explain the new difficulty with the boys, who had chosen to serve him (King Halfdan), without any offence being meant to Yarl Attlé, whom all men honoured and loved. Further he added, that when the spring came on he would bring the boys to visit Attlé's "gård," or court, and if they should have changed their minds they might then remain with him. The warriors departed, and were accompanied to their boat, which led them to their dragon, the big mainsail was loosened, and the ship was soon out of sight of the dwellers at Framness.

But there was much for Hahkon and Orm to learn before they could become belted knights, or wear the eagle's pinions in their helmets. They eagerly sought for opportunities of distinguishing themselves, nor were these long wanting.

For one day as the boys or young champions were riding down to the water's edge, where there were certain fishermen, in whose charge they were accustomed to leave their horses while they practised feats on the water, they met the Lady Ingeborg and her train of maidens in rapid flight from the direction in which they were riding.

Fear seemed to lend wings to the party of girls, for the fright experienced by their fair riders seemed to extend to the horses, and they flew up the wide road from the fishing village at a pace far exceeding their usual swiftest gallop.

Hahkon and Orm, seeing the ladies advancing,

separated so as to let them pass between. They halted their horses, and stood respectfully on either side of the road.

"Help, or we are lost!" cried the foremost rider, a lovely girl of some sixteen or seventeen summers; "keep yonder nithings at bay until we send you succour from the Burg."

Now it so happened that our two boy-warriors had intended to have a little practice with the battle-axe before putting out to sea in the boat used for taking champions to the larger dragons. For this reason they had secured two double-headed Danish axes, which were now hanging one at the saddle-bow of each. Grasping the reins well in the left hand, the two boys, as the girls flew past, became aware of three burly warriors on horseback in pursuit. The boys stood in the road as the men came on, and suddenly discharged their lances full at the centre horseman, who fell pierced through the eye by Hahkon's javelin, while that discharged by Orm struck him in the throat. Quick as thought the boys unslung their battle-axes, and charged fully down upon the other two. Hahkon clefth the shield of his selected opponent in twain, but his horse stumbling he fell to earth, and would have become an easy prey had he not fortunately retained his grasp of the axe, and delivered such a blow upon the hind leg of the enemy's horse that it rolled over, rider and all, just in time to save Hahkon from the sweep of the big war-sword of the horseman, which now clefth the air harmlessly.

As the foe fell Hahkon rose. "Now yield thee," he cried. "Yield thee my prisoner."

"Never!" said the other, in a strong Norwegian

accent. "I will never yield to a beardless baby, and a Swede!"

Down came Hahkon's axe on the Norwegian's skull, and had it not been well defended by the iron rings of which we have spoken as forming the guard of the Scandinavian helmet, he would never have spoken more. As it was, the ring, or rather half-ring, guarding the front of the head was broken in upon the skull, breaking the force of the blow, and not penetrating very deeply itself. But the man lay stunned and senseless.

Meanwhile Orm had fared rather worse. He attacked the third horseman very vigorously with his axe, but the Norseman contrived to ward off the blows full deftly with his shield, and drawing his sword clef^t Orm's new buckler right in twain. Orm drew his sword, and attacked his foeman valiantly, who, however, being on horseback, and possessing his shield uncloven, had all the advantage possible over the unhorsed boy.

For all that, Orm had wounded him severely in the leg, and he was bleeding copiously though fighting like a fiend, when Hahkon joined the fray and turned the tide of war.

"Two to one is not fair in northern fighting," said the boy. "Rest thee, Orm, and let me show this nithing Nils' training with the axe." So Orm withdrew a moment, while Hahkon, with his battle-axe grasped firmly in both hands, delivered such a blow as brought the horseman senseless and bleeding to the ground.

Almost as breathless, Hahkon stands watching the prostrate foe when presently loud shouts are heard and the loud rapid tramp of horses bearing men in

arms along the beaten road. And soon the flash of spears is seen, and King Halfdan's train draws near. They halt astonished at the sight of three stout champions down, while over them two beardless boys are coolly standing by!

"How? What is this? Are these the men from whom my daughter fled? Who slew them? Tell me, Hahkon, straight; great shall be his reward!"

"They are not dead, King Halfdan; one only have we slain; the other two are wounded. But we had surely slain them all, but that our steeds were small, and these three nithings had war-horses, as thou seest, of goodly size, and so we both would beg thee to give us steeds like theirs."

"And did ye slay yon men of war alone? Had ye no help from *men*. For, after all, ye are but lads, and no match for the like."

Here Hahkon briefly explained the whole circumstances of the unequal combat. How Orm and he had resolved to keep the men at bay. How Orm's javelin crashed through the eye of the dead rascal, how he himself (Hahkon) had been nearly slain by the burly brute lying with broken head and cloven shield. In short, he gave a picture of the fray in which, however, Orm was made to play the hero's part.

"Well," said the king, "ye are but striplings for such dignity, but this deed deserves reward, and if I gain consent of all my Ting, I make you belted knights. I thank you, as a father only can whose daughter has been saved."

Yarl Yalmar, who had been examining the features of the warrior whose helmet Hahkon's axe had near cut in twain, exclaimed here suddenly,

"These men are from King Ring!"

"It seems impossible to think so ill of Ring," quoth Halfdan, "as that he should send his cut-throats to our shore to carry off our daughter. Some of you take these wounded men in safety to the Burg. Beg of the queen Freydisa that she may tend their wounds. Two of you must dismount and give '*my boys*' your steeds, for now I mean to ride down to the beach and gain some tidings, if I can, of how these rascals came. Hahkon and Orm go with me, and six more of the train. The rest, take up these fellows and bear them to the Burg."

These arrangements were soon made, and in a few moments Hahkon and Orm were riding one at the right, the other on the left, of "merry King Halfdan," whose mirth had given way to excessive anger at the cowardly outrage.

The result of the investigations at the fishing village was, that the lady Ingeborg had gone down to the beach with her maidens for a swim in the blue waters of the fiord, but scarcely had they dismounted, when a troop of men rushed from the shelter of a ruined hut, and then advanced upon them. The frightened girls re-mounted in all haste, pursued by three of their assailants, who, mounted on war-horses, would certainly have reached them but for some sudden check. The fishers called them Norsemen, but said the boats were Ring's.

In wrathful mood the king rode home, and there he found that one of the two survivors had frankly told Freydisa that he had come from King Ring, who had vowed to bear off Ingeborg against her father's will.

That day, after the noon-tide meal, the king arose

and begged the yarls and warriors assembled to witness that the lads, Hahkon and Orm, should that day, bear the belts of knights, and it was only that their age forbade, or he would fain have ordered them to add the eagle's pinions to their helmets. He then recounted to them all the deed the twain had done, and then he called them to him, and on the upper dais he begged the Lady Ingeborg to gird them with the belt.

This was a worthy sight to see! The belts were gifts of Halfdan, studded with precious gems richly set in the golden squares, that glittered like the sun. And the fair and noble maiden performed her task with joy, and then withdrew to the "bower" with Freydisa and the train. The king then grasped a hand of each and, reached his gold-bound horn, full of richest southern wine, and made them drink the draught that only men and heroes drank in Sweden at that time.

King Halfdan then convened a Ting to meet on that day week upon King Belé's grave-mound beside the harbour bay.

The time was spent in feasting, in jesting, and in play, until the day of meeting brought earnest care and thought.

The sun shone bright and joyously upon the armed throng. Halfdan was standing on the stone above his father's grave. His shield hung from the linden bough above his armed head. His sword was drawn, he wore his mail (or shirt of linked rings), and the sun's arrows were flung back again as they struck against his breast.

In a few short words he told his warriors what a brave deed the two youths Hahkon and Orm had done, and how he had caused them to become belted

champions. Would the Ting now confirm this act, seeing the youths were young, much younger than it was usual for youths to bear the belt.

The applause thundered at the question testified the delight of brave men at deeds of valour.

"Now," said the king, "I need your aid, in that the insult to my race insults the men I rule. My daughter's hand is *yours* to give, not mine, my worthy yarls! And this I told Ring's messengers, and thus he answers me. Just like a nithing churl, he comes to steal the maid! That Orm and Hahkon saved her, thank the gods! But he shall feel my vengeance. Ha my yarls! Steel shall revenge the wrong intended on locks of gold! Nithing! I thought to have had defiance hurled in my teeth by Ring! and lo! he sends his robbers to steal my Ingeborg! Pardon me, yarls, I should say our Ingeborg. Now say, is it peace or war? Shall I sound my war note, or bide the insult, yarls? What is your will?"

Again the storm broke loose, where the gleaming blade was the lightning, and clanging shield the thunder, and the brightest air grew brighter as brave men's thoughts, set free, clamoured for justice for the weak and good against the hand of force.

"War!" was the cry all round the rings, all down the sides of the grave, and a dancing breeze bringing back a sportive echo, "War!" seemed to issue from the dead man's grave.

The warriors held their breath appalled. Halfdan perceived the value of the point, held up his hand and cried, "Hush! When the voice of the dead calls from the tomb for revenge of wrong done to his daughter on earth, he is *nithing* who draws not the sword for Ingeborg, virtue, and right!"

Then solemnly shaking his sword with its glittering point in the air, he cried in a voice full of wrath:

"War to the death with King Ring ! No mercy to Ring or his race. Death and destruction be his. His land we devote to the sword ! The priests who have asked of the gods, have shown that the gods are with us. War, children of Valhalla, war ! Let the blood-red comb glare as a crest ; let the eagle's pinions wave. But never more shall I sleep in a house till I cleave Ring's skull in twain !"

Fearfully excited, he now struck violently with the flat of his sword upon the golden shield hanging from the linden. At the sound, which was heard down to the shore of the bay, a similar clangour resounded from the beach. And then the most glorious sight was seen, that eyes can see or poet's brain imagine. A huge ship, whose swelling bows were plated with burnished bronze, looking like gold in the sun, shot forth from a hidden cove, and swam out into the bay. The head was carved into the likeness of a dragon's neck and head, and this was richly gilt. The stern rose high in air, and was fantastically carved into the resemblance of the tail of the monster. From each side sixteen long oars or "sweeps" projected, helping on the speed attained by the enormous sail. At the top of the mast was what was called the "basket" by some, "the crow's nest" by others, to contain archers and slingers. Oh ! how lovely a thing is a ship in full sail, and the sail of this dragon was full as she flew into the bay, followed by thirty more, some as large as the first, others only carrying ten oarsmen, five of a side. A more gallant sight the sun had never looked upon.

"Worthy champions of Odin ! Sailors of the sea !

Yarls of the ocean ! see the black swans dancing over the whale path, dancing to glory, dancing to fame. Who is with me ? He who sails to-night, let him hold up his blade to the beams, that Odin's sun may dance on the metal that Odin loves ! ”

All the warriors held up their swords.

“ Now drop your points, champions.”

The swords were lowered.

“ Let him who stays on shore hold up his blade.”

This time all the points remained downward.

“ Now am I Halfdan the Merry, again,” cried the king. “ To-day ye all feast with me, and such yarl or freeman who owns a dragon, let him, if not too distant, ride home and bring it with him to join our march over the billows ! ”

After a tremendous dinner, the preparations for sailing commenced. The dragon of the vikings was a long barge-like vessel of exquisite proportions, and, but for the fad of carving the head and tail into the forms above indicated, the shape was the most perfect (for the object in view) ever conceived. The head was similar in its curves to the stern. The ground plan was therefore more nearly a long oval than that of modern ships. The deck was curiously made of planks, so joined as to form a pattern. The bulwarks were pierced with circular holes, at the side of each of which was a small slit or cut, for the reception of a sort of rest inserted into the shaft of the oar, and which would allow of its being relinquished without danger of falling into the water. On the right hand side of the ship, looking towards the head, the steer rudder was fixed. Hence that side was called the steerbord (our starboard), and is so called to this day. Over each hole, called rowlocks

(row holes, our rowlocks), was placed the shield of the champion to whom that spot and oar were appointed as his ; just as we have seen in "hall" his place indicated by his shield and group of arms. The shields were hung outside the ship, and protected the side against arrows and javelins. As the ordinary name for a shield was "bord" (board), the line of defence formed by them round the ship was also called the "bord." Hence, to fall "overboard" was to fall beyond the defence. "In board," meant in the ship within the defence ; "on board," partaking of, or being protected by, the defence ; "above board," fair and boldly looking above the shields, and scorning their protection ; "backboard" is the contrary to starboard, and meant the back or rear of the defences ; "larboard," or lowboard means the side screened from harm by being away from the defences.

No warrior ever slept below. He slept on deck, wrapped in his mantle with his sword in his hand and his other arms fixed over the oar holes, much as the instruments required by the crew of a gun used, in the beginning of the century, to be arranged over the port.

Below, the dragon had two apartments, the one for the horses, the other for the priestesses who accompanied the expedition, and when colonisation was contemplated (as in the conquest of Britain), this space received the wives and daughters of the soldier-sailors who sailed, rowed, and fought the ship above.

A large dragon would contain thirty-six champions besides the steersman in command ; as many horses, and as many women.

Now, "on board" is the word, and the champions singing their war songs join their ships. Let us take a passage in the king's dragon with Hahkon and Orm.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW A GREAT SEA FIGHT WAS FOUGHT BETWEEN
KING HALFDAN AND KING RING.

OUR two boys were appointed to one oar, and having cast lots whose shield should be hung out over the side, it came to pass that Hahkon's was chosen ; but he said that it would be more fair and right if they changed, so that on one day Hahkon's shield should have the honour of exposure, and the next day Orm's. This was accordingly agreed to.

Nothing could exceed the exquisite order that reigned on board King Halfdan's dragon. But what attracted Hahkon's attention most was the curious way in which pieces of oak were inlaid in the deck so as to form agreeable patterns, and not the long straight parallel lines which are formed by the planks on board our men-of-war. It resembled rather a piece of tessellated pavement than a ship's deck of the present day.

That the boys should well understand the construction of a ship (a very important item in the education of a northern warrior), Halfdan had given orders that they should be allowed to see the arrangements below, where the accommodation for the priestesses and for the wives of two of the champions had been completed in a very perfect way. And if they had been astonished at the order which prevailed on deck, no words can express their surprise and delight at the beauty and cleanliness of this part of the glorious machine called "ship." For while the champions on deck were forbidden to sleep on any

bed than the bare planks, or to use any other bed-clothing than their war mantles, the women had every luxury then known in the northern household.

But we cannot dilate on these matters, for a horn is sounded, and as the ship is sailing with the wind on the starboard quarter (a part of the ship between the stern itself and the mast), all the oars are withdrawn, and now the dragon flies, impelled only by her "wing." The champions are therefore at leisure ; and Halfdan, resigning the tiller into the hand of Yalmar, takes the opportunity of reading to them the "*Viking-a-balk*," or code of laws for the government of his band ; a custom still continued in the English navy in reading the Articles of War.

We extract the most interesting of these laws from an old Swedish saga. It will be seen that on each law a sort of comment or moral is made :

" Have a care that no quarrels amongst you arise ;

He who quarrels is worthless at sea.

When an order is given, beware of replies,

But *obey*. Leave all thinking to me !

" Have no tent on board ship, and no screen for thy head ;

Screens are fit for the coward and slave.

Be thy broad sword thy trust, and the oak plank thy bed ;

Odin's sky is the roof of the brave !

" Wine is drink for the gods, but too mighty for man,

At least on the billows, to drink ;

The drunkard on shore may be safe, but to Ran,

If thou staggerest on board, thou must sink.

" When a viking ship comes, bare thy blade to the foe ;

Hold thine own whilst the fierce battle raves ;

He that yields but a foot, to the billows we throw.

He may love those fair "*yielders*," the waves !

" Should a merchant appear, guard his ship on the main,

But his tribute he shall not withhold ;

Thou art king of thy wave, he is slave of his gain,
And thy steel is worth more than his gold !

“ Full short is the shaft of the hammer of Thor,
An ell is the length of Frey’s blade ;
’Tis enough for the brave, but a ship’s length or more
Is too near for the heart that’s afraid.

“ When plunder is taken, cast lots for the spoil,
See that none of his portion complains !
Share my portion among you. Enough for my toil
Be the honour that victory gains !”

When the reading of this rude code was ended, Hahkon said to Orm :

“ Can it be possible that we ever kept sheep, and heard their intolerable ‘ba ! ba !! ba !!!’? Yon code of laws has stirred my heart so, that I only long to face the foeman !”

“ To me it seems a right fair set of laws,” quoth Orm, “ but it has not made me drunk. Thou seemest as though thou hadst been drinking of that very wine of which the use is forbidden ! Thou art wonderfully excited, and staggerest about right strangely !”

“ What a foul thought for a foster brother ! But that the very first law forbids quarreling, I should quarrel with thee.”

“ A true way to prove thy sobriety, when only drunkards quarrel.”

“ Right, Orm ! And thou art right in saying that I am excited by these noble laws. I am ; and as to staggering ! Thou art sitting on a coil of rope at ease, but try and *stand*, while the merry dragon dances. Ha ! Who has broken the law now ?”

This question was occasioned by an effort made by Orm to stand, the result of which was his falling against Hahkon, who held him up, and prevented his

measuring his length on the deck. For the boys had, up to the present time, been accustomed to the motion of small craft, and although well able to manage a boat, were some time in finding their "sea legs" on board so large a vessel as "Shidbladnir." But their experience stood them in good stead; they had no more fear of sea-sickness than any old salt that ever sailed, and their good temper, activity, and courage, won the hearts of all on board.

It was the fourth morning after leaving Framness, that Orm, seated in the "basket" at the top of the mast, called out :

"Below there! On deck!"
"Halloa! Aloft!"
"Dragons in sight."
"Where away?"
"On the back-board (port) bow."
"Are they merchants?"
"No, I tell thee, dragons."

At this joyful news, all such as were not engaged at the oar girded on their swords, made ready their battle-axes, and grasped their javelins, for the dragons were approaching so rapidly that each man felt it full time to prepare.

Then appeared on deck the wonderful apparition of ten priestesses clad in the purest white, each with a sprig of mistletoe in her hand, being the wood of which the shaft was made by which the "white god," Baldur, fell, who yet reigns resplendently amongst the gods. The warriors were all at their posts, each by his shield, and they bowed reverently as the holy valas approached them, singing a song of which we attempt to give a translation, but it is very weak when compared with the original.

SONG OF THE PRIESTESSES.

Welcome, champions, to the hall
 Where Odin waits in glory,
 To greet you who in battle fall,
 As your fathers fell before ye.

The clang of weapons on the sea,
 And the Valkyr's song above it,
 Are sounds to set those spirits free,
 That deathless glory covet.

Life eternal for the brave
 Comes through stern death's portal :
 Viking's death on stormy wave
 Opens joy immortal !

Baldur fell, who now on high,
 Rules the sun of heaven !
 And to those who fighting die,
 Baldur's wreath is given.

Holy maidens, wondrous fair,
 Now are hovering near you,
 From the battle, through the air,
 To Valhall's plains to bear you.

Blessings on the brave shall light,
 Curses on the craven !
 Odin guide your arms in fight !
 Yonder soars his raven.

As this weird chant ceased, the holy maids waved each her sprig of mistletoe over the brow of a champion and then they disappeared down the hatchway, closing the grating after them. Their appearance was so sudden, so unexpected, and so solemn an event that it seemed as though the advent of these brave women had been a revelation from a higher world, and the impression made on all was that of awe, wonder, and delight !

But there was not much time for wonder or

surprise, for a “hail” from the foremost ship called the attention of all the warriors to “business.”

“What ships are those that dare to sail in these waters without permission from King Ring?”

To this insulting demand Halfdan replied :

“The ships of King Halfdan the Merry have come to pay King Grey-Beard a visit, and to chastise him as a coward and a nithing for a mean attack upon a lady. A shameful, foul, unmanly deed, unworthy any man, and a disgrace to the North. For this we hold the nithing king too mean to have proper notice of war. We attack him as a vermin fox in his lair, not as the noble stag at bay!”

Halfdan’s great fault was that he liked to hear himself speak, and this defiance was too long ; although all that he said was true enough according to the spirit of the age. However, Ring allowed him to finish, and then discharged an arrow at his breast, which would have effectually put a stop to all future efforts on the part of the voluble king, for his shield, like those of the other warriors, was hanging in its place, at the ship’s side ; but it may be remembered that Hahkon and Orm hung their shields, on alternate days, on the bulwarks ; it so happened that Hahkon wore his shield on this eventful day, and being close to Halfdan, he received the arrow on it, saving the life of his lord.

The arrow passed through the shield, and nailed it to the boy’s arm. Instantly a cloud of javelins was launched from Halfdan’s dragon, and Orm from the “basket,” or “top,” which was always supplied with a bow and plenty of arrows, launched a shaft so skilfully at Ring as to wound him severely in the shoulder.

That exalted personage flung his javelin at Orm, only striking the mast, however, into which it flew quivering.

Halfdan raised his hand with his javelin, intending to cast it at Ring, but he thought better of it, and discharged a speech instead, which, according to Scandinavian etiquette, must have been more galling than any weapon.

"I bear death's eagle here bound in my hand. I he flew forth, then wert thou lying too low for fraud, and lower even than thy base fame. Thou rascal king! But never fear. My steel is too good for such achievement; I seek a nobler mark than thou!"

So saying, he launched his javelin at a servitor, who had just brought Ring a second bow, which the saga says was backed with steel. He selected the longest arrow, intending to discharge it at the heart of Halfdan; but his rage was so great, that as he bent the fearful weapon, it snapped in twain, with a sharp report, in his hand.

The fight now became general. Nor was the order of battle unskilful on either side. The Swedes and English always loved the "wedge" in fighting, and on this occasion Halfdan tried it at sea, bringing down his ships in two long lines, meeting at an angle of about forty-five degrees. He, himself, formed the "thin edge," or apex, of the wedge.

Ring's formation was a crescent, with the inside curve opposed to the enemy, his theory being to entice Halfdan to attack the centre, which he commanded himself, and then swallow him up, as it were, or rather surround him.

Halfdan, however, by the hollow wedge, defeated

this; for opening out the two lines as a carpenter opens out a foot-rule, from an angle to a right line, he contrived to pour in showers of arrows, javelins, stones from slings, and even spears and lances upon the curve.

The battle raged obstinately for eight hours, when Ring's left gave way before a violent attack at Halfdan's right, and this brought a number of ships into confusion near the centre.

It was with not a little difficulty that Ring found himself able to draw off in time to save his whole fleet from destruction, and, by dint of admirable seamanship, to bring the vessels in safety under cover of a promontory, where there was a very strong force advantageously posted.

The whole time he had shown himself to be a first-rate leader and a capital sailor. With his drawn sword in his hand, he was everywhere at once; commanding, threatening, and even imploring his men.

But it was of no use. His losses were too immense. Six of his finest dragons were sunk. His decks were covered with the slain, and the victory was with Halfdan, who was only prevented by a strong breeze off shore from executing summary vengeance on the head of the "nithing king." This wind, however, came laughing over the cliffs, inviting all the waves (green, white-crested, and deep blue) to dance in the light of the setting sun, and the ships danced too, and were so happy in their victory, that how Ring escaped is a wonder to this day. Escape he did, though sorely wounded. His error was that he despised his foe, and advanced confident of success. On this account he did not care to select his

warriors and ships with his usual prudence, and many of his larger dragons lay still in harbour.

But, without much delay, he addressed himself to the work of getting ready for immediate action ; not taking sufficient care of his wound.

In the meantime Halfdan was busy repairing damages. The priestesses and other women below had set up what sailors now call "the sick bay" or hospital on board ship, and the wounded champions were treated with the most tender care. Hahkon's arm had pained him, but fearing weakness from loss of blood if the weapon were withdrawn, he had asked a warrior to cut off the wood of the javelin, so as to allow the steel to remain in the flesh, "helping him," as he said, "to hold the shield."

The care of the skilful leeches soon enabled Hahkon to re-appear on deck, with his left arm bandaged, and his "sword-arm" free ; but Orm had received a wound from an arrow, at the side of the neck, which, had it been a finger's width nearer the throat, would have quenched his lamp for ever, and, as it was, it required great attention on the part of these pre-Christian Sisters of Mercy to prevent the wound from becoming fatal.

The work of repairing damages went briskly on. Many were the arrows pulled out of the ship's side, and from the bucklers of the warriors which had guarded them. Javelins and spears were extracted from the mast, and of these Halfdan said, "They will do duty a second time."

But there were some of the band who could not do duty again, whose brave lives had been spent in the service of their lord, and who had met the death they coveted, in the thick of battle.

One of these champions was carried below, and tended by his wife. On removing the war tunic and under tunic or *skiörta* (modern English, shirt) it was found that he was *wounded in the back*.

Great was the consternation of the poor woman, whose pride in her husband had hitherto been boundless. "How is this?" she said. "A coward's wound?"

The champion was nearly sped, but this word roused him, and brought him back to life.

"Yes," he said, "it was a coward blow from Ring, if it were intended, which I doubt. I was struck while hauling on the halyard, for the sail was slack, and then a lance entered my shoulder. I take no shame, for I was in my duty. Besides, I do not die from that."

"The gods be praised, I breathe again!" said his wife.

"Yes. My death wound is here," said the hero, pointing to an arrow wound full on his manly breast.

The woman called a priestess to her aid, who took the champion's view, saying :

"The back wound is not mortal. Besides, he was not turning his back in fear, but in valour, and the wound is a 'holy' one. He dies the noblest death of all, 'geirr's odd' [the point or "odd" of a spear, arrow, or javelin] on his breast. The death of Odin ; the holiest wound."

"Art satisfied?" asked the champion.

"More ; more than satisfied. Canst thou forgive my doubts?"

"I do. Farewell! We meet in Vingolf's hall, to part no more. I go to great Allfather!"

He never spoke again.

One of the most solemn events on board a modern

war ship is the burial of the dead at sea. It was not much less so in the viking times we tell of. The hero, in his armour, with his weapons, helm and shield, wrapped in his mantle, was committed to the deep, with the words :

“Receive thy champion, Odin !”

On Halfdan's ship, as he was a crowned king, he said these words himself, as each departed, “warrior taking his rest, with his martial cloak around him,” was lowered over the side.

The ceremony was concluded with a death-song, or “drapa,” composed for each of the slain by the skald or minstrel on board, with a chorus chanted by the priestesses.

The work of repairing damages being complete, and the funeral rites performed on board all the ships of the fleet, Halfdan determined to continue the war by an attack on King's stronghold, the destruction of which would greatly weaken his power in the North, and perhaps even cause his name to be for ever lost among the roll of warrior kings whose fame had made the North what it was and is.

Ring was furious under the smart of his defeat. He vowed vengeance deep and bitter against “Halfdan the Fool,” as he indignantly called him.

Scarcely allowing time for his wound to heal, he commenced giving orders for renewing the combat, by sending his best “hertoga” or leaders of the host to cut off Halfdan on the homeward track. He himself would take the supreme command.

In a state where unity of thought and purpose prevails it is astonishing with what rapidity measures can be carried out; and in the North, where the chief object was Valhalla and the second victory, there was

no disputing except at the Ting, therefore men pulled together for the common weal in those days, so the Northmen triumphed everywhere, and spread their race abroad.

But for all the speed that King Ring made, King Halfdan's speed was greater; and when King Ring put out to sea to wrest the victory from Halfdan's hands, he found him "all a-taunto," as the modern sailors say, that is, as ready for the fray as ever; with ships as bright and orderly as though but newly launched.

"Ha!" exclaimed Ring, "the fool is wise! I knew not he had ships enow for such a vast reserve. By Odin's Raven! there are more than in the morning's fight, and fresh and newly fitted!"

"Nay," said a chieftain standing by the helm, for Ring, like Halfdan, often steered himself; "the ships are neither new nor fresh arrived. Believe me, Ring, they are this morning's ships refitted."

"By Odin's Raven, thou art right!" said Ring. "Upon them, warriors, they are an easy prey!"

So the word was given to advance. Fresh men had come on board, and the rowers plied the oars and the warriors stood prepared to launch their lances upon Halfdan's men as soon as they could aim. So the rowers plied their oars, protected by the shields, while the other warriors stood ready to launch the spear.

But Halfdan had provided a mighty store of arms, especially of arrows with heads of tempered steel; his mainsails hid his motions as the dragon ships came on; and every champion bore a bow of the toughest yew-tree wood and each aimed at one of King Ring's men standing with well-poised lance.

"Now, when the sail is lifted," cried Halfdan, "bend your bows."

Down came the bird-like vessels upon the fleet of Ring, whose warriors stood ready to hurl the deadly spear. Suddenly the course of Halfdan's ships seemed changed, they luffed up to the wind, the sail was lifted, and the storm of flake-like shafts broke forth! Each arrow had a deadly aim; down dropped Ring's warriors, slain before they launched a spear.

Then Halfdan righted his ships quickly and bore down on the foe.

And what a crashing shock was there when the proud dragons closed! Ring's ship was struck amidships by a gallant "hertog's" prow, the rest were soon disordered, and many sank.

Who shall chronicle the horrors that ensued? The saga whence we quote says grimly: "On this day was a sea fight with great slaughter. The battle remained to Halfdan the king. But Ring fled to his burg with loss of many warriors."

It was, according to a skaldic poem, one of the fiercest combats ever known. It was fought with equal skill on both sides. The war-blades rang on helmet-rings, and shields were cleft in twain. The sword is the champion's plough-share and his reaping hook and scythe! It sows the seeds of the tomb, and reaps the harvest of glory. So the good blade of King Halfdan reaped glory and fame for its lord, and the battle was fought on the billows. The goddess of the deep, Ran, or Rana, as she is sometimes called, received many a prize.

This shows us that Ring was a second time sorely defeated, and by a less mighty foe.

Now when the war ships came crashing mightily

against each other, and the fighting men sprang from Halfdan's ships upon those of Ring, they found many dead on the deck slain by the arrows' fierce flight. Still the stout men at the oars dropped them at once from their hands, seizing their weapons instead. And of the victors there fell a right goodly number that day. But besides those who "*slept in the sword*," many were taken by Ring as prisoners to serve him as slaves, or else to be slain by the axe.

Among the prisoners to old King Ring there was a wounded youth. His left arm had been bound with skill. He leapt on board like a furious lion. His sword, though not so weighty as the blades of the older champions, did much harm among the Ring's people, and a grim old warrior knocked him down with a spar, saying :

"Kill the game chicken and avoid the war-cock's rage. Fair is the boy, and valiant. It may be he may yield me gold. If Halfdan buys him free, so much the better for my coffers!"

On board this ship there were no priestesses; only a leech and some few horses were below. So the rough viking flung the boy into the hold as modern men might fling a sack of corn. And when the ships, retreating, had gained their harbour, Ring commanded all the prisoners should be yielded up to him. A day was set apart when all these captive men should be drawn up in order and beheaded as they sat on benches before him.

Accordingly, in the morning, when Ring had break-fasted, the prisoners were led out for execution. They were seated on long benches and their legs were bound together by a rope, osier twigs were twisted in their hair. A slave was then placed behind each to

keep his head steady by holding fast the osier twigs twisted into a band for that purpose.

The executioner began his work by striking off the head of him who sat outermost on the bench. After he had beheaded the next two, he asked the prisoners, "What they thought of death?"

"What happened to my father," replied one, "must happen to me; he died, so must I."

Another said, "He was a viking, and had no fear of death." A third declared, "That a glorious death was ever welcome to him, and that such a death was far preferable to an infamous life like that of an executioner, or of his master, King Ring!"

"I only beg of thee," said a fourth, "to be quick over thy work; for thou must know that there has been a question, often discussed by us of Halfdan's band, whether or not a man feels anything after losing his head. I will therefore grasp this knife in my hand; if, after my head is cut off, I throw the knife in thy face, it will show that I still retain some feeling; if I let it fall, it will prove just the contrary. Strike, therefore, and decide the question, and make no more delay.

The executioner struck off the man's head with a stroke of his battle-axe, but the knife instantly fell to the ground.

"Strike the blow in my face," said the next, "I will sit still without flinching. Shame were it to a champion of King Halfdan's, if he could not meet the stroke of death unmoved! I will not wink an eye!"

The turn now came to Hahkon, whose golden hair had grown considerably, and he was right proud of the length and beauty of his locks, which hung in

ringlets over his shoulders. In answer to the question as to his ideas of death, he replied : "I fear not death, since I fall in duty, and since I have been able to do my duty well. But I must pray thee not to let my hair be touched by a slave, or stained by my blood."

Upon this one of Ring's champions laid down his sword and shield, and, approaching Hahkon, held up the hair with his hands, sending the slave away. When the stroke was to be delivered, however, Hahkon "dodged" his head forward so strongly, that the warrior had his hands cut off.

"That is a brave boy!" said Ring ; "wilt thou accept thy life at my hands?"

"Willingly," said Hahkon, "but on one condition."

"What is that?" said Ring.

"That thou wilt grant the lives of all the rest."

"Loose the rope," said Ring, which was done, and the king rose from his seat, and went into the "burg" to rest.

Our young viking coolly asked the warrior who seemed to be most important, from the directions which he began to give in Ring's absence, "whether he might have his combed cap, belt, and arms?" After some demur this request was agreed to, and with his left arm bandaged, his sword by his side, and a lance in his hand, he, with the rest, walked down to the beach.

Here, very soon, there was plenty to do and see ; for Halfdan, following up his success, had resolved on effecting a landing on Ring's shore, and had approached a promontory, to which he had rowed his dragon, and where he disembarked his men, and attended personally the disembarkation of the rest,

With joyful ardour the young sea-warrior ran, accompanied by those who owed their lives to him, to meet his kind protector and king ; who, on his part, was delighted to see him alive. On hearing of the butchery practised on his men, he exclaimed : "The sun shall not go down until King Grey-Beard has atoned this insult."

Rapidly as possible the horses were brought on shore, and the bold sailors were in short space transformed into as stately knights-errant as could be dreamt of. The inferior warriors followed on foot ; but also superbly armed with sword, shield, spear, two javelins, and the double-headed axe.

Nor had Ring been idle. As soon as the landing of Halfdan was known, he hastened to repair the grave error that had been committed in allowing them to land.

Of course the force under Halfdan was not to be compared to that commanded by Ring ; but what was wanting in numbers was made up in skill and weight of men. The horses were fresh and glad to be on shore.

The battle began by a discharge of arrows from a large body of foot drawn up on the plain between the landing and the burg. These were received on the shields of Halfdan's men, who cheered loudly as the arrows came.

Hakkon had secured a full-bred Ukraine charger, sometimes (though rarely) seen in Sweden. It was as black as a coal, and its skin as glossy as the finest satin. He seemed proud (as any horse might well have been) of his rider, and they galloped on into the storm of arrows, caring very little about them. At the approach of the cavalry Ring retired his

bowmen, sending forth a grand array of spearmen on foot to meet them. But Halfdan's horsemen drew their big battle-blades, and cut off the heads of the spears, and then those of the spearmen!

Not to weary the reader, suffice it to say that the day declared for Halfdan even more emphatically on shore than it had afloat. Ring's men were dispersed or cut to pieces, and he himself, already wounded, received a thrust from a javelin which brought him from his horse. A hertog (leader, general, or admiral) and two champions placed him on his horse again, and fled with him to the "burg," where he expired in their arms.

With much spoil and many prisoners, Halfdan began the voyage home, where he arrived without any adventure worthy of note.

When Ring was dead, a certain yarl was chosen to reign in his stead, until his son, a boy of ten years of age, should be old enough to "make their laws and lead their host." The king was interred in a grave mound, like King Belé's, in his full armour, with his horse, arms, and, as some say, his slaves, who were killed to accompany their master and minister to his wants beyond the grave. A skald composed a "drapa" or death-song over him, of which we give a few verses in translation, as a specimen of the style of versification, called alliteration, then common in Scandinavia and in England.

RING'S DRAPA.*

Now rideth royal
Ring over Bifröst.†
Bend 'neath the burden,
Beautiful bridge.

* Imitated from the Swedish of Tegner. † The rainbow.

THE CHAMPION OF ODIN.

Valhall's wide portals
Wing open ; "Welcome!"
Bursts from the heroes
Holding his hands.

Brag⁶* the Beautiful
Bends o'er his gold harp,
Sweeter far soundeth
The strain than of yore.

He sings of the Sword-King,
Severed on battle-field
From his brave berserks,†
Soaring above.

Freya, the fairest,
Fondest, and truest,
Lovely and lightsome,
Listens with joy.

High in Valhalla
Valfather voweth,
Seldom has king's son
So welcome been seen.

All of the Æsir,‡
Champions the choicest,
Drink to his drapa
Now through the North.

* God of song and history. † A class of warriors.
‡ Race of the gods.

CHAPTER V.

HOW HAHKON AND ORM PASSED THE WINTER.

THE delight which the two boys, Hahkon and Orm, felt, on being reunited after their first separation, was very great, but the discipline of northern warriors forbade any very lively demonstration of any such feeling. A French or Italian, nay, even a German boy, does not consider it beneath him to exhibit ecstacy at the sight of a friend, while a Scandinavian, whether Swedish, English, Danish, or Norse, thinks he makes an ass of himself by showing the tenderness which he feels, perhaps, more than the southerner.

So, when Orm and Hahkon met at Grimfield, the seat of Ring's government, there was no embracing, no sentiment, no "*gush*." They nodded to each other carelessly, but never asked after each other's wounds. When they were together on board Halfdan's dragon, Orm made the first allusion to Hahkon's adventures, by saying, in a voice of assumed indifference :

"That nithing king showed pluck."

"He was not such a bad fellow as I thought."

"How about his treatment of the Lady Ingeborg?"

"Nothing but spite."

"It was a nithing's deed, all the same."

"Bad enough was the deed, but Ring was not the rascal I thought. He fought like a bear-slayer, and he

loved brave men." Then Hahkon told the tale of the butchery of Halfdan's men, and how he had escaped and saved the rest.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Orm. "That was brave. Thou hast ever the luck of it. I had to keep below, with a hateful hot pudding round my neck, to cure the arrow scathe! By Thor, it irked me to wear it!"

King Halfdan, lying near the boys wrapped in his long blue mantle, overheard their talk. He said nothing to them at the time, but noted the tale in his mind for guidance afterwards. Soon after this conversation the boys fell asleep.

The day was counted from noon till noon, as sailors still count time at sea. The watches were similar to those used now on board English and Swedish ships; and it was in the mid watch (from twelve at night till four in the morning) that the boys were wakened from their sleep by a tremendous shower of rain, so terrible as to threaten to wash them overboard. They started up to their feet, but could see nothing, the darkness being too profound. Halfdan was at the helm, but there were no stars to steer by, and the "dead reckoning" was a very different thing then to the elaborate piece of navigation now so called.

The wind increased in fury, bringing down fresh floods of rain, then came a flash of lightning that lit up the horizon for a moment, and this was followed by a crash of thunder that rendered the horses below nearly unmanageable.

"Go down below," said Halfdan to Hahkon and Orm; "cheer the horses, help the women. Ran is hungry for the ship and crew."

He spoke with ill-concealed anxiety ; and well he might be anxious, for the flash had revealed to him a fearful range of low black rocks just on the port bow to leeward. A lee shore on such a night as this was enough to appal the stoutest, but Halfdan never flinched. The sail was lowered, and the oars on that side all got out. The warriors tugged with might and main and brought the good ship round !

"Bravo, champions of Odin ; well pulled, by Thor!"

But another flash showed him that, although the ship's head had been brought round, they were still drifting towards the rocks. He called to stout Yarl Axel to help him at the helm, and ordered both sides now to row, and pull with might and main.

Meanwhile, the flashes became more frequent, and the wind grew icy cold. Big hailstones mingled with the rain, and clothed the deck in white. Ever and anon the billows broke over the good ship, threatening to sweep away the very mast in their fury.

Then said Halfdan, "The storm grows fierce, my brothers ! Ran expects us champions. But we will charm the sea-goddess with a gift of gold."

Then he drew from each arm a mighty golden ring. They had been the gifts of Belé, his dead father. Quick as thought he hewed them into as many pieces as there are men on board, and gave to each his share.

But the tempest roar increased, and the dragon hardly dragged her weary length along.

"Brave Shidbladnir, bear us till we gain our haven ; gold rings of the purest shall adorn thy neck."

The good ship seemed to know his voice, and

raising her burnished breast against the boiling sea, fighting with strength and fury, strove hard to stem the waters now raging to bring her down.

"Well fought, my gallant war-ship ! This is no mortal tempest. Trolls are at work against us. Lo ! I will up and sec."

In those days, aye, and for many centuries later, the belief in the power of certain mortals to affect the action of the elements by magic arts was strong in the human mind. God has given to man a want, a craving for something to worship ; and a sense, a feeling that there *is* something higher than this world of mud and stone. And if the light of Revelation has not reached man, or has been perverted by his folly, the yearning for Him still remains, and must be gratified in some way or another ; and men who have not true religion supply the want with superstition.

Halfdan was a brave warrior, and though he believed in witches, or trolls, he did not fear them. So he climbed the mast in the midst of the tempest, and a lightning flash revealed to him a mighty eagle flying abaft, and a bear swimming in the waves.

Now, there was a story in the Scandinavian creed that two wizards (the brothers Heyd and Hamn) had been for their wickedness compelled to wear the forms of animals, and in such forms to revenge themselves on men for certain injuries which they had sustained.

As soon, therefore, as Halfdan saw these creatures he called to Yarl Axel at the helm to bring the good ship round, and so meet the bear. This was done, although little could be seen of the direction of the ship save when the lightning played.

But Halfdan seized the bow, which was still in the





"HE . . . SHOT ONE ARROW, POINT-BLANK, IN THE BREAST OF
THE EAGLE."—*p. 83.*

top (or basket), and from the store of arrows he selected two. Then standing in the giddy basket, with ship heeling "gunwale to" (as sailors say now-a-days), that is, with the shields along the side nearly touching the water, he watched his chance, and shot one arrow, point blank, in the breast of the eagle as it was revealed to him by the lightning. The bird fell with a scream into the boiling surge. Again the king waited until a vivid flash showed him the shaggy bear. Another arrow! Missed? No. The lightning plays around a crimson stain, and soon the monster lies a lifeless carcase in the deep.

"Well done, my dragon! Well hast thou earned thy rings! The trolls are slaughtered, and our band is saved."

For it is an extraordinary fact that, as the carcase of the bear vanished from the face of the deep, a frightful blaze of lurid lightning rent the sky, a deafening peal of thunder boomed athwart the sea, and the storm was gone!

Men say that Heyd and Hamn have never more been seen, and in that ship were not wanting those who declared that the bear and the eagle were nothing more or less than the two dread trolls, whose magic arts had kept the North in fear ever since the creation of the dwarfs.

Of this belief was Halfdan.

"See, my warriors," he cried, as the storm-cloud passed and the blue sky shone above them, as pure and clear as the soul of a warrior, "the glowing stars point out the track from which we have wandered in the storm."

"Mark, yarls and freemen, the sea is like a pond! But, by the hammer of Thor! the waves are no

courtiers! They souised me as though I had been a fisherman at work. They yielded to free valour, not to me. The viking is the true lord of earth ; aye, and of ocean too! Ha! champions! say I well?"

The shields were on the ship's side, so that there could be no applause thundered in the usual way, and only the low growl, which has before been referred to, was heard ; which meant as much as "hurrah" does now-a-days.

In the fore-part of the hold a portion was divided from the horses as these were from the priestesses, who lived "aft." In this fore-cabin, or fore-hold, the provisions for all on board were kept, and now certain servitors appeared from the fore-hatchway bringing horns, barrels of ale and mead, a wooden plate for each warrior, and huge hams of the bear, the boar, and the elk ; others brought brown bread roasted, so that it should keep for some time without becoming unfit for food.

These delicacies were distributed first to the priestesses below, who every morning appeared on deck to bless and cheer the warriors with kind words, and every evening, as the sun sank in the western waters, performed a similar rite.

On the morning succeeding what the champions ever after called "the battle of the trolls," these noble women approached King Halfdan with a wreath of the sacred mistletoe, which they offered him, chaunting at the same time the following song in praise of valour and virtue, typified by that mysterious plant :

I
Wear this wreath of mystic worth,
Halfdan the Merry!
Know the meaning of the mirth
Caused by the berry.

2

Baldur, god of truth and light,
 Halfdan the Merry !
Fell beneath this weapon slight,
 Bearing the berry.

3

Love restored him to the skies,
 Halfdan the Merry !
Godlike valour never dies,
 But lives like this berry.

4

The berries white are Nanna's tears,
 Halfdan the Merry !
That washed away Valhalla's fears,
 So smile on the berry.

5

The stem betokens force of arms,
 Halfdan the Merry !
The greater force of beauty's charms
 Is seen in the berry.

6

By thine arms the trolls were slain,
 Halfdan the Merry !
All men's love thy virtues gain,
 Then wear shaft and berry.

The mystic wreath no sooner touched the gay king's brows, than a loud shout of delight went up from the assembled warriors, and the chorus, "Wear shaft and berry," was borne away by the eastern breeze to the islands of the west. The measure lives on in many of our popular ballads, whilst the joy in the mistletoe is only understood by us, the descendants of the viking.

The king was greatly pleased by the gift of the mystic wreath, and promised the fair donors a royal gift of bracelets when they should all reach shore.

Looking round upon that little band, he saw Hahkon and Orm regarding him with earnest glances of love and devotion that he well could understand and read.

Kindly he advanced to where the boys were standing ; he said,

“Friend Hahkon, I have not forgotten the timely use of thy shield. But for that I should have missed the rare sport I have had with the trolls, and the greater pleasure which this wreath has given me. Ask what thou wilt ; if thy wish be in Halfdan’s power to grant, it will not have been uttered in vain !”

“My only wish is to be with thee for ever on the water.”

“That were rare sport, indeed ! Faith, men would call me ‘Halfdan the Ferryman,’ instead of ‘Halfdan the Merry Man,’ were I always on the water. Thanks all the same ! But, as I cannot grant that wish, I will give thee, instead of the boon so craved, as soon as thou canst take full charge of a ship and men, just such a dragon as this.”

Hahkon drew himself up as stiff as a spear-shaft, as he said :

“I do not deserve it, King. I have done no more than any man or boy in thy train would have done ; and Orm, my brother, merits more reward than I.”

“I do not see it,” said the king ; “but I will give him the same promise that I gave thee, and grant whatever he may ask, in reason, that I can give.”

“I want nothing,” said Orm, “but to be near my brother Hahkon.”

“That shall be as thou pleasest ; for I intend to give thee just such a dragon as his, so thou mayst be as near to him as ever thou canst sail.”

"Thou art too good to me."

"No, I am not. I want men like the mistletoe, weapon and gem in one. But tell me, and tell me truly. I will not chide or be the least bit angry at the truth; but I must have it."

"Did I ever do anything base, King?"

"Not in my service."

"Then how canst thou be so cruel as to think that either I or Hahkon ever told a lie?"

"Ye are but boys."

"No boys that yearn to grow up Odin's sons will dim the lustre of their souls by lies. Ask thy question. Be sure the *truth* shall come from me."

"And if my question leads thee to betray thy brother?"

"Then I shall give no answer."

"Right, boy. Thou art the stuff to make a chieftain's heart throb with delight. My question is not dreadful, after all. It only is, Wast thou not frightened in the midnight storm, when thou and Hahkon went to see the horses? Tell me the truth, or hold thy tongue."

"I had no fear, King Halfdan."

"Good! I believe thee. Now another question. Why hadst thou no fear, I ask?"

"My mother, well I know it, bent her knee to Baldur and to Tyr, and prayed them to protect me; me and my foster brother."

"Didst thou not pray?"

"No, King; at least not then."

"Why not? If prayers to Tyr and Baldur help so much, why didst thou not pray thyself?"

"It would be useless, King. If they would not hear her, holy and good, a very vala, how should

they list to me? No, King; I knew my mother's prayers flew like the doves of peace to Baldur's throne, and therefore I felt safe. Besides, fear and I are strangers."

This was quite a long speech for Orm, who was a boy of few words. Halfdan liked talking very well himself, but cared not for the gift in others.

At length the time arrived when the brave dragon ships anchored in the bay not far removed from Framness. Great was the joy and gladness spread around by the tidings of the king's return.

To those who fell in fighting against Ring, right noble "Bauta stones" were raised. Huge blocks of granite stone set on end, with many *runes* engraven on them to tell the world to come how heroes lived and died when Halfdan the Good was king. The stones are standing yet, but few can read those ancient letters, still called runes. So mysterious are they thought to be, that the word *runic*, though only meaning, originally, something belonging to the runes, is often employed to denote anything mysterious. The most perfect runic alphabet was the English.

The ships were drawn up on the beach to be preserved through the winter. Dainty houses were built over them, much straw was brought to keep the terrible rigour of the climate from them, and all the smaller portions of their wonderful construction were put within the "burg," while those ships belonging to the wealthy yarls serving under Halfdan were taken round to the dwellings of their owners on the coast.

But before they departed there were solemn gifts of rich gold rings (or bracelets, rather) to be made to

those who had distinguished themselves ; and to the good priestesses many rare and costly gifts were given. Halsdan gave each a golden bracelet, as he had promised, and built a new temple for their use.

The Lady Freydisa, queen of that fair kingdom, welcomed the champions to " Hall," and the women and priestesses had their place in " Bower," as long as they chose to stay.

Brenda was in the highest state of joy. " Happy," she used to say, " are those who *see*, but how much happier those who *feel!* and the dear Lady Freydisa, the queen, has put the feeling in my heart as though she were my child."

One peep within the Bower will show her in her home, friend of the queen, known and beloved by all.

" How shall we mark the pansar [chain-mail armour] in the cloth ?" asked a fair sunbeam of a girl, with hair like a cornfield, and a heart like the harvest. " How shall we mark the linked rings of iron that guard the breast of the hero ?"

" Speak gently ; Brenda is here, and it would pain the old blind woman, good as she is, to hear us talk of taste and colour."

" Say what thou wilt before me, Hertha," exclaimed Brenda ; " my ears are sharpened by the loss of sight. The gods make all things 'square.' I was not always blind, fair maiden, and colours are a pleasant memory with me. May I tell thee now how I would show the pansar ? "

" Pray tell us ; thou wilt know better than any here."

" There is a saga where a fair king's daughter weaves a piece of tapestry like yours ; and how says

the saga-man? Ah! I remember. The lines run thus:

“‘The royal maiden sits and sings
A hero’s song of warlike things;
Dext’rously his exploits weaving,
On dale, or down, or billow heaving.

“‘Soon in the fair white cloth behold
Lances appear of burnished gold;
Redly the battle spears are flying,
Bright silver threads chain mail supplying.

Therefore I should certainly advise silver threads.”

“Very cleverly remembered, Brenda,” said Freydisa the queen. “Strange that thou shouldst know more about colour than we do! I never find thee at a loss when I seek to know what colours blend best together.”

“I was always fond of colours, lady, and loved the blue and gold, whether in the mantle of a yarl, or in the blue vault above with its shimmering stars for spangles; and when I was young I was very vain, so the gods have sent me the loss of the power to see. It has lent me a clearer sight than I possessed before.”

“How is that, Brenda?”

“Before, I saw with the outward eyes of the dead body, now I see with the inner eyes of the living spirit.”

“Thy speech is far above thy rank in life; nay, it is above mine, for it is of the gods.”

“I was not always a peasant woman, gracious lady. There was a time when—but that is past! Now, I am poor old blind Brenda.”

“Tell me somewhat of thy former state, good Brenda.”

"Not now, so please you. There may come a time when I may tax thy patience on behalf of Orm."

"When thou wilt; but hast thou nothing to tell me of thy foster son, Hahkon? King Halfdan loves him greatly."

"I cannot tell thee much. It is some twelve years back, for it was after the death of Belé, a dragon came into the fiord, and I was sitting at my cottage door, watching the gallant bark (for then my eyes were like thine own), and saw the sun and waves. Well, from the dragon's side a sloop put forth, that rowed into the narrow creek that leads up to the village. A tall, stout warrior, very young, but strong as Asa Thor, came bounding up the cliffs, right to my cottage door. Orm was a little baby two months old, or three, and he was sleeping in a basket at my side."

"Who was thy visitor?"

"He was a viking, and he asked me very sharply whether I would take charge of such another child, the son of a brave viking, fallen in battle. As he said this he showed me a lovely boy, wrapped up in silken weed, that he carried in his mantle."

"A noble bairn, no doubt."

"Yes, right noble, both in brow and eye. I took the child, and promised the bold viking chief to bring him up with Orm. And when I asked the infant's name, the warrior told me he was called Hahkon, son of Yoms, the son of Thurs the big, both drowned at sea, both sons of Odin, and brave viking blades. The warrior flung a heavy bag of gold upon the bench, 'for the boy's keep,' he said, and vanished down the cliff.

"I never saw my husband since. He fell in glorious war, so I should not complain. But things went

badly after Svend was slain. The cot was burnt, the gold was taken in the raid which the Norwegian vikings made upon us in the ensuing spring. I lost my sight, and in my poverty bred the two lads as hinds."

"But gave them noble thoughts, good Brenda. They are the bravest youngsters in the train, and when King Halfdan praises them for aught, either one says the other should be praised, not he ; or else they say that all they do or think that's good and noble is due to Brenda's teaching."

The winter now had spread its feather bed of snow all over sleeping Nature. But the lakes were clad in armour, and the pine woods glittered bright in their dazzling panoply of white, gemmed with the crystal ice.

Hahkon and Orm were taught to run in those immense snow-shoes which we all have seen in pictures, but few have ever worn. They sought the brown bear in his lair, they hunted the grim wolf. They trapped the fox, they skimmed the lakes on skates or in the sledge. But, best of all, they learnt the art of carving runes. They learnt to sing the songs of old from many a hoary skald. And how they loved the stirring deeds of champions, vikings, and all of Odin's sons. And they could touch the skaldic harp, and wake the sounding string that bade the champions of long ages passed away live once again. How those grand old stories filled their boyish hearts !

On one occasion, it was the morning after a grand feast in hall, and the youths had laid themselves down to sleep, in their blue war-mantles. They had arisen, refreshed and bright. They donned their thicker

mantles lined with the furs of wolves which they had slain. It was, however, *too cold* for out-door exercise, and the friends returned to the hall together with a laugh.

"How different from my dream last night! Fancy! I dreamt I was mounted on Grané Sigurd's battle-steed, and rode to the 'burg' on the mountain, and I dashed through the fire, cased in ring pansar of linked mail, and wearing the eagle's pinions of a champion of Odin. The flames hissed and crackled but never singed my plume. I reached the 'burg,' and the dragon Fasner roared at me, and vomited fiercer flame; but I held on my way to the 'hoard.' And there it lay, untold, unthought-of gold."

"What then?"

"Old Halvar sounded the horn and woke me; and here we are in a cold that brings down the sea eagle dead and stiff, frozen in his flight. Ugh! how I hate, I loathe the winter."

"Nay, that's not like Hahkon. Winter is just the time I love, because it is the time for learning the noble art of war. I love the sagas and the holy hymns that the skalds and the priests sing in the winter."

"That's true! Nothing beats the Havemál for teaching a man how to live and to die!"

"Die! Hahkon. The hero never dies. He is laid asleep by the sword, and awakes in Valhalla, while his name shall live as long as the world endureth."

"True, Orm; but he will live longer if he be a noble champion and become the friend of the gods; for at the end of the world, a new heaven, 'Gimlé the Golden,' shall take its place, a new race of gods

shall arise, and we, the champions of Odin, shall reign with them for ever in light and glory."

"Well, all that is true enough, but we did not learn it in the summer. The legends of our race are taught us in the long winter's nights, when the king sits on high in hall and drinks the nut-brown mead, and the warriors listen to the harp and learn those wonders that gladden the heart to hear."

"I love the legends of Asa Thor, and when I hear his chariot wheels that unlearned men call thunder, and see the passage of his dazzling war-hammer through the sky, that the churls call lightning, then I know that he is combating the brutish giants for our good, and I feel how like a nithing I should be to do the least bad deed to vex such gods as ours. I am not clever, but I am not ungrateful."

"Let us play 'tables,' it is a good preparation for war, and King Halfdan loves well to see us play it!"

Tæfel or tables was a game of skill and chance combined, something like our modern backgammon, of which indeed it was the prototype, being called by the Anglo-Saxons, "bog-gamen," or horn play, on account of the pieces being made of horn.

The boys played at this until the mid-day meal was served, when the hall had to be cleared and the board spread.

The meal was substantial, consisting of a rich soup or stew cooked in an immense kettle or cauldron over the fire in the centre of the hall. Each warrior had his little bucket of oak with gold, silver, or bronze hoops, into which this rich soup was ladled from the cauldron. He ate first the more solid particles of flesh by means of a perforated spoon, through the holes in the bowl of which the liquid portion ran out;

when the solid morsels had been thus disposed of, the liquid was drunk from the bucket.

Then the horn was filled with mead by damsels of the train, who went behind the seats of the champions with earthenware pitchers of this curious drink, from which they poured it into the horns of the champions, who then drank to the health of some person whose name had been given out by the king.

When all was over, the queen and her maidens withdrew, and the cooks left the hall to regale on the remains of the repast.

Then uprose King Halfdan and thus addressed his train :

"Champions of Odin! I call upon you to give me your true and free thought about the fittingness of giving my young warriors Hahkon and Orm the right to wear the eagle's wings in their helm-rings before they have attained the age of full manhood. They have showed themselves men before their time, and deserve to be rewarded as men also before the time."

A growl went round the table, intimating applause.

Then said the king, "Hahkon and Orm, with the consent of the warriors of my train, I hereby give you full leave and right to wear the wings of the eagle, showing that ye are champions of Allfather.

"Hear ye the meaning of the mystic emblem. When Odin, in his combats with the giants, descended into Jötunheim, he was taken prisoner by a giantess, and confined in an iron 'burg,' open only at the top; it was so deep and so high that escape was impossible. Odin, however, seeing a mighty eagle hovering above the mouth of this prison, half pit, half tower, seized his bow, shot the eagle, and

affixing the wings to his shoulders, flew up to the seat of the sun, and so to Valhalla.

"When we become captives to the gross feelings of our sensual natures, of which the giants are the proper emblems, no escape is possible until our hearts and minds are raised by Odin's pinions on high, and far above this lower world. Therefore the champions of Odin wear the wings of the eagle, while the warriors of Tyr wear the comb of the cock."

Again applause was uttered, and a champion now brought forward two charming helmets formed of hardened leather, protected by iron rings, of which one formed the base to which two half rings were affixed, crossing each other at the apex or crown of the head. One of these was continued down below the ring which formed the base, and projecting over and beyond it made the "nasal guard" used by the Normans afterwards.

With great solemnity two eagle's wings of large size were now affixed to the lower or base ring, and fixed in such a manner as to tower high above the heads of the wearers. When this was done, Halfdan exclaimed, speaking to each boy separately :

"Wear thou the eagle's pinions. Let them be a sign to thee, and a token to men, that thou hast soared above the baseness of earth ; that thou hast left the prison of the giantess, and, instead of being a slave to low and base desires, thou art become a man!"

CHAPTER VI.

HOW HALFDAN VISITED ATTÉ THE SEA-WOLF.

OUR boys were more than ever anxious to air their eagle's wings, and were greatly pleased when Halfdan the Merry announced his intention of placing them on board his own dragon, with the right of hanging their shields one on each side of the middle of the vessel, where less powerful rowers were required than at the bow and stern.

Old Brenda was serenely happy in her new home, and rejoiced with the fervour of a true Scandinavian at the career opened up to her boys; and although she could not see their stalwart forms now expanding under the influence of martial exercises, and the war-like training of the "burg," she seemed to have full knowledge of all the changes wrought in them by means of that special gift of perception which serves the blind instead of sight.

Frequently she talked to them of the high and god-like station among men of the champions of Odin, and often reminded them of their duties in a manner which struck the boys with awe and wonder. She knew many sagas in which brothers were recorded to have done many things by faithfully holding together, each fighting the other's battles when living, and one always avenging the death of the other. Her teachings were so different from what they had been when the ideas to be inculcated were for the guidance of peasant life, that it seemed hardly possible they could have come from the same lips; and

yet, even in the humbler state, there had been a dignity and refinement in the principles which she strove to instil that would not have disgraced the proudest chieftain of the North.

“ Sons,” she would say to them, “ beware of pride. For the proud are ever hated, seldom feared, and never loved. Never envy a noble birth, for your own is the gift of the gods ; but it is in your own power to make your names respected. Who can boast of his father’s glory ? Each man has his own. The bow which a man cannot bend is not his. Let thy foe-man’s dwelling be a distant place for thy footsteps, however near he may dwell ; but wherever thy foster-brother’s dwelling is, let it never seem too far off.

“ Always obey the king, even should he be in error ; for remember that the government must be performed by one person. Where there are many rulers there is anarchy ; bright day has only one eye, and the dusky night many.

“ Be careful in choosing friends ; be not ready to grasp the hand of every one who seeks thee in friendship. The house whose door is always wide open has the least in it to lose ! ”

Such were among the precepts which she made the boys learn. She herself had learnt them from the sacred poem called the *Havemál*, to which we have before alluded, and she told them all the charming stories of the old Northern faith, illustrating the beauty of friendship and brotherly love. The tales were made more impressive by her way of telling them, by the tone of her voice, by the ardent love she bore to the youthful champions, and by the immense respect with which all classes were accustomed to treat “ Brenda the vala.”

Hard and severe though the Scandinavian winter is, it passes away with extreme rapidity, and spring comes with a bound. The rivers dance down to the ocean, singing as they go. They throw their armour off, and men put on theirs! The vikings meet to decide on fresh adventures, and the dragons seem to have roused themselves from the slumber of winter, and to shake their heavy wings to the pleasant breeze.

How busy the workmen are with axes and hammers, in repairing the hulls of the war-ships. The earth is spread with a rich green carpet of tender grass, and all Nature rejoices. In the whole district of Framness battle horses are coursing, with their heads in the air, sniffing the breeze, and scenting future battles. Every day the older champions have inspections and wonderful drill meetings of the younger members of the community. Rich landed proprietors review their tenants, labourers, and "house carls" or domestics, to see which are fittest to serve in King Halfdan's wars, when called upon to appear before him in arms.

But there is no war immediately to be undertaken. King Halfdan proposes a friendly visit to Attlé the Sea-Wolf, and he designs to make that redoubtable warrior a suitable present, one befitting his state and the prowess of the host.

It was a grand day when Halfdan, in his golden helm, standing in the steer oern or steering place (corrupted now to stern), received his warriors on board his ship!

"By the hammer of Thor! Yarl Yalmar, the sight of these merry warrior faces is always good for the heart of a Northern king. They are as bright as the rings of their armour, eh? No rust there, my

friend. And their voices have the ring of true metal. Ha ! ha ! say I well, champions ? ”

This was received with the musical clang of shields beaten with the flat of the swords, as the warriors stood around at their stations for inspection. The shields had not yet been hung over the side, for other preparations had to be made before this solemn act was performed.

“ Champions of Odin,” said Halfdan, addressing his brilliant crew ; “ to-day we hang our shields on the bulwark, and each warrior feels himself part of the gallant ship that wears his shield for him and with him. This shows, as we dance over the billows, that there is but one heart within the dragon, as the shields form one armour without ! The armour is the linden wood bound with gold, but the heart is gold bound with iron.”

Here he paused, and looked round him gaily, and the clang of metal told how his speech was relished by his band.

“ We go on a peaceful visit to Yarl Attlé, and we shall show him that we are neither boasters nor brawlers, but stern champions who know the courtesy of peace as well as the hard need of war. It is, therefore ordained that no act of violence shall be done by any of us without the consent of the warrior-crews of all the dragons of the fleet. Any champion breaking this law will be guilty under the first law of the ‘ *Viking-a-balk*,’ and shall be nithing.”

The usual applause followed.

“ I have little more to say,” continued Halfdan, “ save that although we have no war token flying from the mast, and fare in peaceful guise, I intend to observe war discipline. Ye may now hang your

shields in their places, and then go on shore for your horses."

The last use made of the shield was to awaken the din of applause by which these warriors expressed their willingness to abide by Halfdan's decree.

Then came the ceremony of "placing the shield," which was a very solemn act; when this was once performed it was considered by the owner of a shield a deep insult if any other warrior removed it from its position.

It took some time for this rite to be accomplished, and when every ceremony had been duly observed, half the number of the crew went on shore to see after the horses.

Amongst those sent on this service were Hahkon and Orm, who proceeded in the direction of the burg, to take a final leave of Brenda, and to receive her last blessing.

After this solemn duty, they presented themselves to the Queen Freydisa, who gave each of them a golden bracelet to wear in memory of her good will.

Then they performed a weird and solemn act, of which we must give some particulars.

They provided themselves with two drinking horns, and begged two experienced warriors to accompany them to a field at a short distance from the house. When they had arrived on the ground they threw off their tunics, drew their swords, and struck them firmly into the ground, with the hilts upwards. The elder of the witnessing champions now bared his dagger, and made a slight wound in the left arm of each, so that the blood flowed. This was then received in a small wooden bowl, which thus became the receptacle of the

blood of both. The two arms were then applied to each other, so that the wound in the left arm of Hahkon should cover that in the corresponding arm of Orm. They were then bound together, and the horns were filled with wine. Then holding the bound arms over the two swords they drank, saying :

“We swear (or *sword it*) brotherhood !”

“We are brothers until death. If one be killed, the other shall avenge his fall.”

“Our blood is mingled on our ‘foster earth,’ and in our veins.”

“Brothers in peace and in war, the quarrel of one is the quarrel of the other ; but we swear never to allow strife to come between us.”

“Health to the gods !”

“Health to Thor and Odin especially !”

“Health to our foster-mother !”

“Health to King Halfdan the Merry !”

“Health to thee, Orm !” said Hahkon.

“Health to thee, Hahkon !” said Orm.

These healths exhausted the stock of wine which had been brought, and when this was done, the mixed blood in the bowl was poured on the ground with these words :

“Foster earth, foster earth !

Receive the blood of foster-brothers

Be thou witness of their bond !”

The bandage which had held the two left arms together was now removed, and the limbs separated and bound up. The swords were ceremoniously removed by the witnessing champions and restored to their owners, who now put on their tunics and sheathed their weapons ; then leaping on horseback, all four

galloped off to the ship, where they arrived in excellent time to embark their steeds.

As there was no military expedition in hand, and no intention of founding a colony anywhere, no women whatever were taken on board, and this gave more room for the horses.

Then there was life on board! Getting the war-horse into the narrow space allotted to him below is seldom a pleasant task; but our forefathers were so thoroughly accustomed to the management of their steeds, that the animals seemed to have lost all desire to act of themselves, and to yield up their very being to their masters.

When all were embarked, the warriors stood at their stations.

The shore was crowded with spectators glad to witness the pageant of the departing ships (for Halfdan sailed with ten dragons as a guard of honour), and yet amongst the numbers thronging headland, beach, and cliff, there were some sad hearts! Brenda was sad because she could not *see* her "brave boys" in their brave array on board at their stations; and a little band of chosen champions drawn up near the place of embarkation of Halfdan's special crew were also sad, because to them had been intrusted the charge of guarding the women and children in the absence of the king, and they burned to join their brethren afloat, but duty kept them on shore.

The spring sun laughed with delight as the gorgeous pageant flung back the rays shot down upon the ships and men, and then threw a golden glow over them, as a promise of their future glory.

At mid-day the anchors were weighed, and the stalwart warriors bent to their oars and urged forward

the "golden swans," that looked ever more golden and ever more swan-like as they swam from the crowded shore.

As the oarsmen pulled they sang a rough wild strain, the words of which it is very difficult to render into modern English. The following is as near an approach as we have been able to make :

"Pull away ! pull away ! brave sons of slaughter !
 Though peaceful our passage to Attlé may be,
 We still have to war against weather and water,
 And the battle with both is our life on the sea.
 Pull away, pull away to the sea !

Set we the sail in the broad breezes swelling,
 There was never a sight that more gladdened the free ;
 Welcome ye waters ! farewell hall and dwelling !
 We barter ye both for a life on the sea.
 Pull away, pull away to the sea !

Free as a falcon in flight is the viking ;
 There never was warrior more dreaded than he,
 He scours the deep, or the land, at his liking,
 He braves death on both who loves life at sea.
 Pull away, pull away, pull to sea ! "

The strain was caught up by those on shore, who sang back in reply the lines :

"Farewell ! Odin prosper the free !
 Good luck to our champions at sea !
 Come back with your hearts full of glee,
 With a harvest of gold reaped at sea.
 With honour and glory from sea ! "

Aft, with the tiller in his hand, stood Halfdan, keeping the good sail full ; and as the ship sped out to sea and the shelter of the land was lost, the sail swelled more round, more full, more powerful, as the breeze freshened.

"Lay in your oars ! Rowed of all !" he cried ;

and the enormous sweeps, large as those used by lightermen of the present day, were, as if by magic, placed in board on a crutch erected on deck for their reception.

"Hear how the daughters of *Ægir*, the sea-god, play round the keel! Ha! one of the fair ones just seized the rudder! It must be a bigger wave that wrenches it from the hand of Halfdan! See how they fling their white veils of foam over their heads, that we may not fling ourselves into the water, mad for their beauty!"

Then said Yarl Yalmar: "We fare in peace, but methinks there may be work on the waves yet, before we have the foster-earth on the lee-bow again. I seem to hear the flutter of Odin's raven in the air, and last night, in a dream, his maidens, the valkyriors, who choose the best of the slain from the field of battle, sang a welcome to Valhalla in my ears. It may be that the mead horn is awaiting me in Valhalla; that were a glad thought for a freeman and a warrior!"

"All in good time, Yarl. But now let them ease off the sheet a little. So! Well! Belay! That's a bold dragon! Seest thou, Yarl? we are first of the fleet, as a Northland king's ship ought to be. I promised Hahkon to let him steer a spell this trip. Send him to me, friend Yalmar. Send him aft. I long to see whether he has learnt the art of steering big ships. And hark, Yarl; send Orm with him. The boys have pulled together, let them steer together."

Then they came aft, and the good king himself showed them what steering means when you steer a big dragon full of armed men, and how the stars show the way (like finger-posts on shore) over the trackless ocean.

In two days they had reached the bay of Tredalund, where Attlé dwelt with his men close to the water. Many smaller boats shot out from the shore to speak the new comers. A fleet of large and well-armed dragons was fitting out ready to repel invasion; and had Halfdan come in war, there would have been stout resistance to his coming. As it was, the flag flying from the mast-head showed neither the raven nor the eagle; it was a simple white pendant with, at the broad end near the mast, a beautiful dove worked in silver threads that shone bravely in the sun.

Therefore smaller boats from the ships and from the shore came forward with all speed to question the new comers, and, after some pleasant converse with many valiant champions, the ships of Halfdan anchored in Tredalund bay, close to the land, and King Halfdan went on shore in great state, and was kindly received by Attlé, who led the train to his great hall, and begged the warriors to rest and drink mead, while Halfdan and Yarl Yalmar, together with certain other leaders of distinction, who commanded ships in Halfdan's fleet, took their places on the daïs, or high bank, with Yarl Attlé the Sea-Wolf.

"It irked me so, my friend, to refuse the boys to thy request, that I have brought them to answer for themselves. So small a matter shall make no ill blood between Attlé the Sea-Wolf and Halfdan the Merry!"

The Sea-Wolf laughed, as he said: "Thou art better known as Halfdan the Grim; and it seems to me a fitting title, for, despite thy merry and jesting mood, it were an unlucky joke that should be made upon thee in thy hearing, I trow!"

Halfdan replied with a jovial laugh, and reaching his hand to Attlé, said: "Enough, friend, we understand each other! Now about the boys."

"King," said the yarl, "I cared little for the lads, save that I saw and heard what seemed to me better suited to warriors than to herdsmen, so I asked them of thee to train them to arms. But as thou hast done so, I have nothing more to say. Yet, in truth, the elder of the twain had a touch of my dead wife that led me strangely to him!"

"Well, he would not disgrace thy strain. He has shown himself a stern warrior, he has slain a bear, he and his foster brother Orm. He has twice saved my life in battle, and has shown himself, for his years, a good sailor. I let him steer my dragon."

"May he come to the high-bench for a short space? I fain would question him, if thou wilt allow?"

"Ask what thou wilt, and where thou wilt, the hall is thine, and so are the boys if they care to take service with thee. I will not gainsay them; only thou knowest I could not *give* them to thee as though they had been hounds, being freemen of my train when thy messengers arrived. Now they are trained to war they may serve thee if they list. Oh! here they are, stalwart lads and bold. Say I truly, or does my liking overrate their worth?"

The boys stood bare-headed on the daïs, before the king, the yarl, and leaders. They, not the least abashed, stood proudly, but respectfully, before the assembled lords, waiting for them to ask what question they might please.

Yarl Attlé started in his seat as Hahkon, with his long golden locks rolling down upon his shoulders, stood before him.

"It is she herself!" he cried. "Boy, who art thou?"

"I am Hahkon, the son of Yoms, the son of Thurs, who was drowned at sea."

"Yes, that was the tale I heard when first I saw thee, but I would fain know more. Thou art not the brother of the peasant Orm?"

"Orm is no peasant, Yarl; he is a champion of the king's. He is my brother by Northern custom, we have drunk brotherhood over the swords and mingled our blood in Northman fashion."

"Do not jest with me," said Attlé, frowning impatiently. "Who and what is the woman who nursed you both at Framness?"

"Brenda, the blind vala."

"Where is she now?"

"She is in bower with the Lady Freydisa and her maidens," said Halfdan, interrupting Hahkon and answering in his stead. "But she has told a strange tale of how the boy was brought to her."

Here the king repeated the story of the visit of the warrior the gift of gold, and all things as we have already told the reader.

When the warrior who had left the boy in Brenda's charge was mentioned, Attlé rose in great indignation and exclaimed, with a furious blow upon the table,

"Yes! Now I see it all. But it is too vile a plot. My own brother, too! That any one of our race should be a nithing! Dear king and lord!" he continued, turning to Halfdan, "if it be as I think, I shall have strong reason for gratitude to thee. But before I can tell the world boldly all my thoughts, I must have speech with that same old blind Brenda."

"When thou wilt," replied the king. "I will send a dragon back to Framness to bring her hither, if it will give thee ease."

"No," said the yarl. "I have a project which we shall discuss hereafter. Let the boys take their places in hall, and let them wear these arm-rings in memory of me."

So saying he drew off two splendid golden bracelets and presented one to Hahkon and the other to Orm, but Hahkon's was more valuable than Orm's.

Then the youths returned to their seats amongst the other warriors, and Attlé said to Halfdan,

"If I be not greatly mistaken, yonder fair-haired Tyr is destined for great deeds. He has begun well, and he is fortunate in being thy man. Now I shall tell thee of my plan for the conquest of England!"

"What!" cried Halfdan. "Conquest, or only a viking raid?"

"Conquest of the mouth of the Humber, and then we have the north-east coast to land on, and room for reinforcements. The stupid English have thrown down the sword and taken up the ploughshare ; ugh ! the loons ! and more than that, they have thrown off the noble creed of Thor and Odin to follow the whimsies of a Welshman.* Faugh ! I have no patience with the crew. They teach the doctrine of pure peace, men say. What a foul creed for warriors ! How can such peasants as they have become, guard the fair land their fathers won ? "

"I wonder, too," said Halfdan, "how a northern tribe can sink to sloth and stoop to till the land.

* All foreigners, especially the Greeks and Romans, were called Wälsch, and St. Paul was called a Wälsch-man.

Were there not Kelts enough to work for them, but they must hold the plough ! I blush to think of it."

"Thou seest," said Yarl Attlé, "that they left but few Kelts alive, and those escaped by flight into the mountains, so that the English were compelled to work or starve."

"Ha, ha, ha ! Do I look as if I starved, good Attlé. No, by the raven of war ! Not I, nor thou either, if we come to that ! And yet my men are free, free as the very winds that fill the sails. The sea is our portion, and the fields we plough are furrowed by the sword ! Ho ! skald ! tune up thine harp, the while we drain a horn, and sing us a stave from some old saga of the sea. Health to thee, Attlé ! Health !"

A hoary harper, with long hair and beard, white as the driven snow, and shining like burnished silver sang the following strain from a popular saga, renowned through all the north, and sung at the present day from Torneå to the Belt.

Thou mighty sea,
Unknown to thee
Is king's oppression
And rights suppression !
Thy king is he
Amongst the free,
Who qualeth never
How fierce soever
Thy boiling wrath
On him breaks forth.
Thy fields of azure
Are viking's pleasure,

And his keel cleaves,
Plough-like, thy waves.
His oak-stems flourish,
Which blood-rains nourish.
Steel, flashing fair,
Is the seed sown there !
Those fields of story
Yield crops of glory
And gold. To us
Be true, and thus
We swear our pillows
Shall be thy billows.

This was favourably received, and the rude Northmen prepared to pass the night in the usual way ; that is, in immoderate drinking. The horns were

emptied and filled more frequently than we, who are truthful historians, care to tell; and the morning found the champions still carousing.

Attlé had convened a "Ting," or meeting of his retainers who held lands of him under military tenure, and they were all to come together to the "Doom-stones" to discuss the expedition which the yarl had already proposed to Halfdan; and so, without further rest, the whole band sallied forth to the place of meeting, for the time appointed was early dawn, and the other tenants and vassals were expected to be punctual.

The king therefore assumed his golden helm, the prototype of our crown; the Yarl his helm with the golden band, forerunner of our coronet. They put on their mantles of state and their belts of splendour denoting their rank, and with shields bound round with gold, were (thanks to the swiftness of their steeds) soon on the appointed ground.

Here, in deference to his superior rank (not that he cared much about it), Attlé made King Halfdan take the chief place at the Ting, placing himself at his right hand, and a priest of Odin at his left.

The ceremonies began by the slaughter of a horse to Odin, and the divination from the quivering lungs of the victim spoke a favourable augury on the expedition. Then Halfdan addressed the assembled throng, and said that he intended, if the Ting thought fit, to join his forces with those of Attlé, and undertake with him the conquest of the degenerate Angles, who had adopted the creed of the Welsh, and, forswearing the gods of their fathers, had become servile tillers of the land, unfit for fame and glory, and therefore unknown to the skald. He described the

English as nithings, with whom it was unnecessary to keep faith.

His speech partook of a certain grim humour which greatly delighted the assembled warriors, and was violently applauded.

Then uprose Attlé the Sea-Wolf, and proposed that as the king had come to them as a visitor, and had offered to share in their expedition, they should request him, in virtue of his rank as king, to take command of the whole as "Hertog" (general) of the Northern force. He concluded his speech by saying:

"We go on a merrymaking that shall make our wives and maidens merry, so what better leader could we have than Halfdan the Merry? The English may have cause to think him Halfdan the Grim, but what is that to us? The inside of a shield is the merry greenwood tree, the jolly linden, but the side turned to the foe is either the proud gold or the hard steel. So to us is King Halfdan the 'merry,' and to the English the 'grim.' "

No words of ours, in our debased modern tongue, are strong enough to describe the storm of applause sounding from the shields struck by the mighty swords. Proudly stood Halfdan there, and the merry king was gone! Was that stern metal statue the jovial hearty king? No; it was the statue of the god of war in gold and steel, not flesh and blood! All that was human seemed fled, and he looked what he was, the fitting leader of a viking band.

"Well," said Hahkon to his brother Orm; "didst ever see the like? What a change! Like the face of the ocean, one moment smooth and gentle as a polished shield; the next, all storm and war. A right

merry king is he, but I am not certain that I like him better in his merry mood! One feels the grimness coming. When it comes, we all can brave it, and love it when we see it. He is grand in storm."

"Thou wilt turn skald ere long, Hahkon. I like thy mood well. Put me that thought to verse and thou wilt beat yon hoary harper in the hall to nothing. Hist! what says the Yarl?"

This question had reference to a speech by Attlé on the advisability of increasing the force under King Halfdan's command; and this having been agreed to, a week was granted as the time for preparing stores, getting the ships ready for sea, having all available men and horses on board, and for providing accommodation for the priestesses and other ladies of the fleet.

This was carried by universal assent. Then Halfdan proposed to return in order to obtain fresh men and horses, his proper quantum of priestesses and other female companions in the path of glory, and further supplies of food for the expedition, and be back again at the week's end.

This was settled in the usual way, and then it was agreed that Halfdan should leave for home that very day, accompanied by his train, excepting Hahkon and Orm, who were, by Halfdan's permission, allowed to be on board the dragon of the Sea-Wolf as his special aids and friends.

"Ha!" said Hahkon. "What thinkest thou of ba! ba!! ba!!! now, Orm? This is something like! Halfdan has sailed away leaving us to the Sea-Wolf. Ha! What can Attlé want of me? He is wondrous kind, but what it means I cannot tell."

"Belike he thinks he sees in thee the face of some

one gone to Odin, and so he loves thee. I should ask him for a ship, were I in thy place!"

"That would not be clever, Orm. He will give me a ship as soon as he thinks I can command it. Halfdan has promised the same, and what in the name of Odin am I to do with two dragons?"

"Give one to me?"

"Not a clever answer; for Halfdan has promised thee as well as me a ship so soon as thou canst win respect enough among his warriors to command it. I think our little trip to England will just be breathing time for us, and both the leaders will be watching us."

"That's all the same to me. I do my duty. If they like it, well; if not, the fault is none of mine. Hahkon, I'll race thee on yon level patch for two new lances and an English sword."

"Agreed; but who shall be the umpire?"

"That will I." And turning round, the boys beheld the Yarl. But nothing disconcerted, off they flew, the distance being settled by the Yarl, and to his satisfaction Hahkon was proved the winner. Again the Yarl gave him a bracelet of very massive gold.

And all the time that Orm and Hahkon stayed on shore, the Yarl was like a father in his love. He watched young Hahkon with loving eyes, and every time when he displayed his skill and showed himself superior to the rest, the viking's eyes would glisten with delight.

At length the time arrived when all the ships were in due sailing order in the bay. On board the shields were fastened. Horses neighed below, priestesses all in white stood on the well-carved decks, the

warriors in their ranks decked the gay ships with valour.

On the morning of the day agreed on by the chiefs, dark specks rose on the offing. These grew larger and ever larger, till at last the ships of grim King Halfdan were revealed. Closer they came, then joined the Sea-Wolf's fleet, from which tremendous cheers arose.

Then at the helm, each on his dragon-ship, the leaders stood prompt to set sail. King Halfdan gave the words, "Sheet home," and "Hard a-starboard," "Odin and victory." "*Let fly the Raven flag!*"

Instantly every ship, as if by magic, threw out a crimson pendant to the wind, much broader than the pendant of a man-of-war of these degenerate days, more like the "burgee" of a merchant ship, that bears her owner's sign and name. But all these flags were *red*, red as the crimson blood that soon should flow at that dread sign; and on the crimson cloth there flew a jet black raven with its wings displayed.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW THE NORMAN VISITED ENGLAND.

IN the ninth century of the Christian era, shoals of predators from the north began to harass these shores. The celebrated pirate-hero, Ragnar Lodbrok (Ragnar of the shaggy hose), had been thrown ashore on the Northumbrian coast, his dragon-ship was wrecked, and he, unable to escape, formed the design of marching up from the coast with his small band of desperate men, and subsisting on the results of their conquest.

Ella at that time was king of Deira, and with the force of his kingdom marched up to the fearless vikings; a fierce though unequal conflict ensued. Ragnar, clothed in the mantle which he had received from his beloved Aslauga at their parting, four times pierced the ranks of Ella, but his friends fell one by one around him, and he at last was taken prisoner alive.

Ella obeyed the impulse of barbarian resentment, and doomed his illustrious prisoner to perish with lingering pain in a dungeon, stung by venomous snakes.

The sons of Ragnar Lodbrok, indignant at the treatment of their father, prayed their countrymen for aid against the English; and if excuse had been wanting among these fierce Northmen to attack any place whatever, there was plenty of it now. For northern etiquette required that injury done to a father should be bitterly avenged.

The successes of the viking arms in France emboldened them to enlarge the field of their conquests, and this, combined with the representations of the sons of Lodbrok, produced the most serious invasion to which England had ever been subject. In the spring of 852 a confederation of Northmen came over in three hundred and fifty ships, plundered Canterbury and London, and marched into Mercia. Bertulf, king of Mercia, endeavoured to oppose them, but he was defeated with great slaughter.

After this victory the Northmen turned southward, and entered Surrey. The West Saxons collected under Ethelwulf and his son Ethelbald, and at Áclea (Oaklea), the field of oaks, the two nations met, and a battle ensued, which the desperate courage of both armies made long and very deadly. It was not until the greatest part of the invaders had perished that they lost their ground.

From this time the conflicts with the Northmen became of grave importance to England, and it is well known that Alfred the Great, the son of Ethelwulf, was nearly deprived of his kingdom by these invaders.

One bright morning in May, 854, a fleet of splendidly armed and well-equipped dragons came into the mouth of the Thames, and although history is silent as to the names of the leaders of the host, we know very well that they were Halfdan the Merry, Attlé the Sea-Wolf, and their train.

They met with desperate resistance ; but so determined were they to succeed in their adventure, that although their loss was something appalling, Odin's raven still floated from the mast-head of each dragon when the English ships had been compelled to

withdraw. A landing was effected in Kent, where the resistance offered by the celebrated "Kant-wara," or men of Kent, forced the Northmen to retreat to their ships, and get on board and row away as fast as their oars could take them.

Not only were many Northmen slain on this memorable morning, in the landing in Kent, but prisoners were taken. Among these were Hahkon and Orm.

In 824 the kingdom of Kent had submitted to Egbert, king of Wessex, who was succeeded in 837 by Ethelwulf, of whom we are writing, and who, after the defeat of Halfdan and Attlé, repaired with the most important prisoners to Kant-wera-beryg, the modern Canterbury. Here was the cathedral and seat of ecclesiastical government.

The pleasant air, the charming country of the "Garden of England," impressed our heroes very powerfully in favour of the island; and Hahkon observed to Orm, "What cornfields for the horses!"

"Aye!" said one of the guards who marched near them, and who spoke Norse, "and what splendid hop-gardens for beer, as ye shall see when the time comes."

They reached Canterbury, where the wooden church or minster stood just on the site of the present cathedral. Everything awakened the wonder and delight of the boys, who looked upon the whole adventure as a frolic. At last they were brought to a large wooden house or shed or barn, which was to be their place of confinement. Here some clean straw was flung down in two separate heaps for the boys; more bundles were brought for the other prisoners, and then the soldiers withdrew, barring the doors

after them with stout wooden bars fixed to the outside.

The reflections of our two friends were not of the most agreeable kind. There were no windows in the barn in which they were confined, light and air being admitted simultaneously through a hole high above the door ; and even if they should try to escape, and succeed in leaving the barn, there would be little chance of ultimate success in a foreign country, the very language of which was unfamiliar to them.

"This looks bad, Orm."

"Yes ; it is not like the way King Ring served his prisoners. There it was sharp work and merry !"

"Valhalla is as easily reached from England as from Sweden, and Allfather is as near to us here as at home."

"That is true ; but starving is not the way to Valhalla. That is no warrior's death."

"They shall never starve us ; rather than that we will all kill each other, and the last survivor of the band cuts the spear-head on his breast, and so goes to Odin."

One of the warriors imprisoned with them now joined the conversation ; the rest (there were about thirty, all told) had flung themselves down to sleep, seemingly indifferent to the fate in store for them. The communicative hero was one of Attle's band, and he gave his opinion from experience :

"The English will not starve us," he said. "They are too cunning. They will give us plenty of food, but exact heavy ransoms. They are rich and wasteful, but they are not clever."

"They fought well," said Hahkon, "and like tried soldiers, too. I cannot think them fools."

"They are," replied the champion, "of the race of Odin; therefore somewhat of the wisdom of the great Allfather remains to them, and somewhat of the valour of the father of all heroes. But they have left the service of Odin for that of Christ and Paul the Welshman, and so they have lost the old viking strain."

Here they were interrupted by the opening of the door, and a stream of light burst in which dazzled the prisoners for a moment. It proceeded from a number of torches borne by as many thralls, or slaves, recognisable by an iron collar worn round the neck. They were scantily clad, having nothing to protect them from the weather beyond the coarse tunic, or frock, even now found in parts of England, and called the "smock-frock" by farmers' labourers.

These men were followed by another set of attendants who bore large bowls of porridge, great wooden platters supporting huge joints of pork, rounds of beef, and quantities of bread. These were succeeded by others bearing jars of earthenware filled with strong beer, and two boys brought up the rear with baskets, one of which was filled with drinking horns, another with wooden platters and spoons for use in eating the porridge.

"Fall to, my masters," said one of the train, who seemed to be superior in rank to the rest, to judge from his dress, for he wore no iron collar, his tunic was shorter than those of the train of menials; on his feet he wore very dainty shoes, but no stockings. He wore a belt, from which hung the short curved sword called a seax. This worthy commanded a platter, spoon, and horn to be given to each prisoner, and then proceeded to direct the distribution of the

welcome eatables, crying incessantly, "Fall to, my masters."

Any thoughts of escape that may have lingered in the breasts of our heroes were at once put to flight by the appearance, through the open door, of a large body of armed men drawn up in the yard outside. These did not enter the barn, but the "cnicht" who had command of the party, after seeing that his men were carefully posted, came in and gave some directions to the steward, or upper servant, who had the task of ordering the supper.

At last he approached the spot where Hahkon lay, and asked, in English, "whether they had everything to which their rank entitled them?" But seeing that he was not understood, he left the barn and returned with another officer, who, to the great joy of our youngsters, spoke Norse.

The question was repeated in this language, and Hahkon and Orm replied, "That nothing was wanting but freedom, which a Norseman prized far above life."

"That," said the thane, who had spoken Norse, "is, as ye may imagine, a gift which I have not the power to bestow; but in the morning others will visit you, with whom ye may, perhaps, arrange your terms of freedom from this house of thraldom. More, I cannot say. Your lives are safe, and ye will not be starved."

Then Hahkon laughed. "Think'st thou," he said, "that I, a belted warrior of the king's, fear death? I am no thrall nor hind, my friend, but a free champion of Odin. Death! Why, it is the gate of life! We court it on the field, or on the flood, or anywhere but on a couch. And the death of the brave is life

everlasting! But, for the food thou bringest us, accept our hearty thanks. . . . As for service or attention due to our rank, we are all free men here, all men of rank, champions of Odin, kings of the wave; but there are among us those who are my elders, and have better right to speak!"

This answer of Hahkon's greatly astonished the English thane. "These men are pagans," said he to his superior officer, "and yet they die in such real faith in their religion as seldom glows in Christian hearts, I fear! How may this be, I wonder?" Then turning to the other prisoners, he asked them "whether there were anything that he could bring them, or order, to supply their wants?"

Then answered one of Attlé's men, a rough bear-slaying viking blade, "Yes, I would fain thou drainedst a horn with me. The beer is good, and thou art like it, friend; strong, brown, and hearty. Drain thy horn with us. We drink to Odin. Pledge me, gallant friend!"

"Willingly will I drain a horn with thee, but I may not drink to Odin, seeing I am a Christian. Still, I will drink thy master's health for love of courtesy."

"Master me no master!" quoth the viking. "I march with good Yarl Attlé for my land, but that is payment for it; and save that I give this service on the field, where all obey his orders, I am no 'man' of his, no slave, nor hind, nor thrall. Free as the northern wind are all the champions here! Nay, fill thy horn. No flinching. We'll drink to Attlé's health!"

In this all present joined, and the ale being strong and in profusion, there was soon plenty of boasting and loud talking in the barn. The free and easy

manners of the haughty pagans won them admiration from the English, and the night was passed in deep potations and great good-fellowship between prisoners and guard ; so that it would have been difficult to imagine that the reckless, jovial sea-rovers were anything but honoured guests come on a friendly visit, not captives to the swords of their entertainers, taken in the act of wantonly invading the land.

At dawn the thane and his companion withdrew, the guard being relieved. The vikings flung themselves down to sleep, covered in their mantles as they slept on deck or in hall, and soon they were all snoring in concert.

It was mid-day before the sea-rovers awoke ; the very first being Hahkon, who rose from the straw and shook himself, wondering at first where he was. But he was not long in doubt, for going to the door through which the light was streaming in profusion, and attempting to pass the threshold he found himself rudely pushed back with the butt end of a spear into the barn again.

Immediately after this, the cause of the door being open was made apparent by the approach of a train of people of very varied conditions in life. The party was led by a tall graceful man attired in the full dress of a "king's thane," whose immediate attendants were an officer of inferior rank, and a man in the dress of a civilian. Next to these came a reverend looking man bareheaded, and with his head shaven. He wore a long black gown or frock, bound round the middle with a hempen cord. His feet were bare, and his whole dress bore testimony to a studied humility, which did not agree well with the haughty carriage of his body, and the military fire of his glance. He was

attended by others dressed like himself in brown or black frocks fastened with hempen cords, but there was a marked deference paid to him by all in the train, both military and ecclesiastical.

The monk and warrior advanced into the barn, but stopped on seeing the angry looks of Hahkon, who, greatly resenting the unceremonious repulse he had met with, had gone to fetch his sword, which he had left, as he thought, in the place where he had slept : a glance was sufficient to show him that it had been removed, and hence his stormy indignation.

"Nithings!" he cried, "to disarm a sleeper so as to have him at unfair advantage. Lead me to your king or yarl, that I may spit in his face and call him a dog! Foul curs that ye all are; Christians and cowards!"

The "ealdorman," or superior noble, whom we have noticed as wearing the distinguishing marks of a king's thane, addressed the angry youth, saying in very fair Norse: "Be not too wrathful, my friend. Thy arms are safe, and will be returned to thee when thou art set free ; and it is on this very point that I am come with the good Abbot Ceolred to confer with thee and thy fellows. Which is the elder of thy party?"

"Helgé the son of Sweyn is the elder, but I am promised a ship of my own next spring, and am a belted champion. However, if thou wilt needs have an older man, say thy say to Helgé. But who art thou?"

"I am Ethelherd the ealdorman, son of Eanwolf, who was the son of Wulfherd, who was the son of—"

"Enough," interrupted Hahkon. "Come with me ;

there lies Helgé snoring yonder. Shall I awaken him, or will it serve thy turn to speak with me?"

"Nay," said the ealdorman, "I have the commands of Ethelstan, under-king of the Kentish men (ruling them for his father, Ethelwulf), to speak to the elder of your most warlike party."

"Helgé, man, rouse thee!" cried Hahkon, administering sundry shrewd kicks in the ribs of the dormant giant, who, however, soon rose, and shaking his tawny beard and hair, all matted with slumber and the disorder of his potations, made the impression of a stupid lion in the toils, hesitating whether to rend everything before him to pieces, or to 'wait a wee.'

"What meanest thou by thy puppy tricks on me?" roared the "Sea-Lion." "Were it not that we are both prisoners, I would split thy head open with a wooden platter! But soft! whom have we here?"

"It is the English ealdorman, sent by King Ethelwulf and his son Ethelstan, to know what we would have done to restore our freedom."

"And couldst thou not tell him without rousing me? Methinks that is scant courtesy."

At this moment the churchman came forward, and said, in such tones of musical sweetness as to hold all who heard him spell-bound :

"Friends, we come to you who have sought our coasts in war, to offer you peace. You have sought to slay us, and we offer you life; you have sought to enslave us, and we offer you freedom!"

"Upon what terms?" said Hahkon.

"We offer you a choice. Either ye shall say what ransom ye will pay to the Church and to our lord and king for your liberty, or ye shall freely embrace the true faith as Christians, and promise

on your bracelets to return to Denmark or Norway, whence ye came, and convert your brethren there; swearing also on the bracelets never to war upon us again. In which case no ransom will be asked, but ye will receive presents ; or, thirdly, ye shall enter into the service of our lord, Ethelwulf, king of the West Saxons, becoming Christians by the holy rite of baptism."

"Here, Hahkon ! Tell the howling priest our mind, and let me sleep my rouse [drunken fit] off, without troubling me about the Christian hounds !"

So saying, he flung himself heavily down on the floor of the barn, and, wrapped in his mantle, was very soon snoring louder than churchman could intone or warrior bluster !

"Thou seest, friend," said Hahkon to the priest, "that I am left to speak to thee, and give thy king our answer. I would fain consult my brother Orm, who is wise beyond his years in such matters, and I would pray thee to give me until this time to-morrow. Then I will tell thee what these warriors think ; or, if thou wilt, lead me to see thy king, and I will tell him faithfully all that the rest resolve ?"

"Agreed !" exclaimed the priest. "To-morrow noon we come again to thee, and lead thee to King Ethelwulf. Till then farewell. What ye have need of shall be well supplied ; we do not starve our guests, nor yet our foes, in England. Fare ye well !"

And so the train departed.

"Look here, Orm. The simplest plan is best. I vote we pay a ransom. I am sure King Halfdan gladly would redeem his men, and so would Attlé. The money paid, we should be free, and very soon

we would return, and take the value of the gold, aye! ten times over, in war prizes!"

Orm was as brave as Hahkon, but more full of that peculiar cunning which the old Danes possessed. He did not answer quite at once, but after some reflection, then he said :

" No, Hahkon ; that will never do. To fetch the ransom one of the band must go to Framness, the rest remaining here. Should he be sent to Odin on the way, the rest become the bondsmen of these pudding-headed English."

" Well, but what shall we do ? "

" Just hearken to my plan. They have proposed to swear us to the peace upon our rings."

" May we not swear upon them ? It is often done."

" Ay, but in civil matters. It is no binding oath on any matters bearing upon war. Thus : if I swear to give my mantle to thee, I swear it on the ring ; but if I swear to levy war for thee, or keep the peace with thee (which is a part of warfare), then I use my *sword*. If yonder monk had bade us swear the oath to Odin on the sword to keep the peace, or any other thing done in the course of war, then it would have been binding, but on the ring it is no oath at all ! "

" I doubt it, Orm. My bracelet with the runes, they say, is very holy. Brenda has often told me that an oath thereon is very awful in the eyes of Odin."

" Yes, for all civil acts ; but this is part of war, and being so, the ring can form no ground for such an oath. Ask we the champions."

By this time the sleepers had nearly all awoke, and listened to Orm's very nice hair-splitting reasoning, which would have done credit to the descendants of

the sea-wolves living on shore, and herding together in such firms as "Quirk, Gammon, and Snap," a thousand years afterwards.

The warriors unhesitatingly declared that Orm was right in his legal distinctions; and it is a well known fact in history, that when the English in after days, Alfred the Great being king, made the Danes swear upon their bracelets, *they never kept their oath*. It was a quibble, but they thought the promise not binding, and cheated us by law.

With great unwillingness did Hahkon yield. He thought he saw himself compelled to do so, because the rest had the majority.

After a fearful meal, the counterpart of that which they had eaten over night, the prisoners were led before the king.

Now Ethelwulf, the son of Egbert (who died in 836) had been bred a monk. His passive nature, better suited to the cowl than to the helm, was seldom roused to warlike fury; but when it was, men say the storm was fearful, and then he would relapse and be the patient, quiet, peaceful monk again.

And when the Northmen were brought up to him, sitting in "hall" at Canterbury, he met them as if they were merchants come to confer with him on points of trade, or peaceful messengers sent over sea to ask his sage opinions in Church matters, on which his mind was set.

At his right hand sat Ethelstone (or Athethstán, as it is sometimes written), quite another man, and no more like his father than steel is like to wax. But though a soldier every inch, he was right courteous, and very kindly he greeted the prisoners.

We need not dilate upon the splendour of the

hall at Canterbury. Suffice it to say that it was full of armed men and monks, among whom were several of eminence. Swithin was there, the Prior of Winchester ; Ceolnoth, the Archbishop, was there ; Ceolred, the Abbot of Medehamstede (who had visited our friends in the barn), was there, and many more.

Without any pomp or circumstance the king at once opened the proceedings by repeating the choice of conditions upon which the vikings were to be allowed their freedom. When he had concluded, Helgé the son of Sweyn stepped forward (being the elder), and thus addressed the king :

“We accept thy offers of peace, and we require to be admitted into the Christian Church, on condition that thou wilt be godfather to all of us, and send us back to the warriors of Halfdan and Attlé, to convert them to Christianity, and to stop the war.”

“On what do you swear the truth of this ?”

“On what thou wilt, King.”

“Will you swear it on your arm-rings ?”

“Willingly.”

The arm-rings of the speaker were removed, and the oath was performed by each warrior, as he passed before the king, grasping the hand of Ethelwulf through the ring, which was held up by one of the churchmen for that purpose. As this was done, the warrior said :

“I swear by the ring to perform this oath, according to the custom of my forefathers.”

Now came the most important and most interesting ceremony of all. The warriors were removed and brought again before the king, each man clad in a dress of the purest white. A large vessel, like a modern sponge bath, was placed between the king's

seat and the fire-place, in the centre of the hall ; this vessel was filled with water, and the man to be baptized had no covering than the fair linen robe just mentioned.

The baptismal service was now gone through, the king acting as sponsor. The questions and answers being in English (or what we call Anglo-Saxon), the Norsemen had to repeat the forms as well as they could. When the actual baptism was performed, the warrior stood in the large vessel of water, and total immersion took place. Each then received a magnificent mantle of the purest white cloth, and a gold ring from his sponsor.

It is said that some of the Northmen expressed indignation at this treatment ; however, the ceremony went off well enough, and they were all taken to a warm bath, and reappeared dressed in handsome white robes of finest wool presented to them by the king as sponsor.

When they came back to the hall, the tables were drawn out and a magnificent banquet prepared, at which there were three kinds of ale, wine for all the guests, and a profusion of viands of all kinds. The intemperate habits of the Northmen were not much influenced by their extraordinary baptism, and they all of them outdid the English in their use of the drinking horns.

After the banquet many valuable presents were given to them by the ecclesiastics and other persons who took part in the ceremony, and the next day the good archbishop, who spoke Norse as well as English, was to commence the task of teaching them their catechism, and explain to them the tenets of the new creed. They were conducted with great ceremony to

a monastery, where the grand refectory had been arranged as a sleeping apartment for them.

"Well," said Orm, when the English had withdrawn, "how does Christianity suit thee? How dost thou feel thyself, Hahkon, my brother?"

"Like a thief, like a nithing!"

"Nonsense; all is fair in war."

"Enchantments are not fair, and underhand trickery is not fair. Had I not been so young, I would have told yon honey-mouthing king what I thought of the whole trick."

"Thou wilt not betray us, Hahkon?"

"Thou deservest that I should split thy skull asunder for such a speech!"

"We must not quarrel."

"Of course not; but I like not this feeling."

"Well, to-morrow thou wilt know all about these doctrines; I must say, I should be glad to escape."

"How those fellows laugh! They will betray us. Would I were only five years older! I shall let them see that it is not to my taste!"

"Much they would care! sit still."

But Hahkon rose, and stalking down the centre of the room, exclaimed:

"I have done this deed because, being the youngest, I was forced to yield; but I shame me just as though I had stolen a belt, or these clothes which they have given me. I hardly think the life so preserved can be worth preserving. At all events, the holy gods must look with displeasure at us. For we have insulted both Christ and Odin. To insult a man is nothing. He kills me, and I go to Odin! What matters it? But if I insult Odin, to whom shall I go? Christ I do not know yet. It is no matter for jest; and, by

the hammer of Thor! if yonder monks hear us, our folly will have been in vain."

"Thou sayest well," observed one of Attlé's men, "and I for one will stop my clamour and go to sleep."

The others said nothing, but followed his example, and very soon there was no one awake in the chamber among the Northmen prisoners save the two boys.

"Dost thou remember at Framness how, when Attlé first appeared, there was some talk between us of flight? Thou knowest how we scouted the thought as base, and how we said that flight and theft were all one. Dost thou remember?"

"I remember; still, I do not see how it applies."

"Then we were honourable, above anything mean and base. We were peasants then! Now we are belted knights; and what are we?"

"Have a care, Hahkon. Brood not too much; and listen: to-morrow thou wilt hear this new creed explained, then all will be well."

"How so? If I like it not, I tell thee I shall not hide it from the priest; but I will ask him to undo the rite, and let me go to Odin my own way!"

"Very well; keep thy sadness till to-morrow; perhaps it may all blow over in a word-battle with the priest. Don't try a word-battle with me, I do not understand the weapon. Hahkon?"

"What now?"

"The gifts we get at this same baptism are not so bad. I hear they do the self-same thing in France. What! lad! let us go thither and be washed again! If it be good, it cannot hurt us to repeat the rite; and if it be all nonsense, as I think, Odin will only laugh, and say it was a war-like trick, serving the Christians right."

"But if he be in angry mood, and see the thing as base?"

"Then I can hardly think a champion such as thou would be expelled from Valhalla for a trick!"

"Well, we shall see to-morrow."

And they fell asleep.

The next day was one of the grandest that Canterbury had ever known. Such an assemblage of prelates had never been gathered together within the walls of the "minster." The king of the West Saxons and the sub-king of Kent were both present, which was a very rare event.

It is not within the scope of our true chronicle to give the words of the good prelate who expounded the holy doctrines of our glorious faith to those fierce pagan men. Some of them heard the words with stoical indifference; others despised the gentle creed of love and grace so much as hardly to be able to conceal their scorn. Others were much affected. Hahkon's mind was not of such a kind as lightly to give up on insufficient grounds the creed he had been taught by her he loved so well, his foster-mother, Brenda. Much fell into his heart with softening influence, and much seemed very strange and quite opposed to his idea of God.

He asked the good archbishop many puzzling questions, and when the rite was over, neither he nor yet the English were content.

However, Hahkon had given his word to go and teach his countrymen this new, this half-learnt faith, and so he told the prelate he would yet learn more, because he did not feel as though he knew enough to teach. The others, with true viking craft, professed their readiness to teach their friends at home, and were,

in fact, indignant with Hahkon for his want of tact, and dreaded lest, by their being detained until his scruples were overcome, the whole scheme of escape should be defeated. So they urged King Ethelwulf to let them hasten their departure, promising to convert young Hahkon on the way.

At last a ship, called by the English a "long-ship," was put at their disposal, and the men rowed away on the whale-path back to the north.

It was not a pleasant passage for Hahkon. Continual were the jeers which he had to bear from the viking crew, who laughed to scorn the idea of keeping faith with Christians. Yet, be it known, had any one of them given a promise to a son of Odin, it would have been kept to the letter, though it had cost the life of him who performed it.

Arrived at Framness, it was sad to meet faces of gloom, to see the countenances of women no longer filled with admiration of the brave sea-rovers, but turned away in scorn, because the Northern name had been branded with defeat.

As to the king, the merry side of his nature had vanished entirely. It was Halfdan the "grim," with a vengeance! When the English "longship" was reported in sight, he uttered a furious ejaculation. "By the Raven of Odin," he said, "the pudding heads are following us! Well, we shall deal with them full sharply! By all the gods! she is alone! What may this mean? The rowers pull stoutly, not as the English churls pull!"

At last, full of impatience, he donned his hat, or rather cap, with the blood-red comb, and calling for his horse, rode hastily down to the beach and there awaited the coming of the English ship.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW ATTLE THE SEA-WOLF SENT FOR HAHKON.

WHEN King Halfdan heard from Hahkon's own lips how sorely his mind misgave him about his promise to King Ethelwulf and his priests, it would have been difficult to pronounce whether Halfdan the Grim or Halfdan the Merry were his more fitting title, for he *laughed* at the boy's story, and yet was there in his laugh a tone that argued little of mirth. There are sounds of anger and rage less dangerous than the laugh that greeted Hahkon when he told his doubts.

"Thou art young," he said at last, "and the green sapling cannot have the firmness of the gnarled oak. I will not flout thee; but it seems passing strange that a champion of Odin, one of my chosen guard, too, should not see the difference between a Christian hound and a son of Valhalla. Knowest thou not that a promise made to one of us is a promise made to the gods, for we are descended from the race of the gods; but a promise made to a Christian is not binding, he having no part in the grand train that shall meet in Valhalla, and reign with the gods for ever!"

But seeing that Hahkon looked dissatisfied, he continued in a brighter strain:

"I will not have thee look dispirited. Thou a warrior, and whine about what is done! That is of the past, and thou canst not blot it from the past. Thou hast done well, and very well, in saving thy

own arm from thraldom, and the throats of my good warriors from the knife. That thou hast sworn upon the rings and not upon thy sword is not thy fault. Thou didst not tell them that the oath was good. The king himself proposed it. Therefore, have thou no thought. ‘Let not thy conscience bite,’ so say the English.”

“Thou sayest sooth, lord king! but yet I feel a noble champion’s soul should be as clear as the blue vault above us. *I* should not stoop to cheat even an English churl; nay, even a British Kelt! but should hold myself unbent just like the pine tree of the North. Unbending, upright, straight, should be *my* spirit, King. I cannot see, because the man to whom I speak is base, that I must be base too! Because I know a Christian will tell lies, must I forsake the truth? If I do so, I am as base as he, and baser, for his soul has never known the teachings of our creed. King Halfdan, I am wretched! I bring thee yonder ship, and all the men who fell not in the slaughter; but I must see the priest, the vala, and old Brenda before I look thee in the face again.”

“Thou art a shameless lad! What priest, what vala has the right to quell thy doubts, if thine own king cannot decide them! Leave me, Hahkon, for I am very wroth. Go! seek thy foster-mother, and when thou seest what wrong thou dost to me, Valhalla, and our priesthood, then we shall meet again, but not till then. Away!”

Hahkon left the presence of the king, silenced but not convinced. He felt within himself that his was the hero-light, and the still small voice kept whispering: “Truth is the truth, to whomsoever spoken. Right is still right, even to Christian foes.”

He went to the “búr” (or bower) where the women dwelt, and told his foster-mother all his trouble, and how his mind was torn with remorse for what seemed to him a base deed in saving his life at the expense of his honour.

But she comforted him with pieces of old-world lore from the *Havemál*, the great book of counsel and wisdom, which was committed to memory by the priests and valas of the North; and whether it was that the absence of impression from the outer world rendered the mind of the old blind woman more clear and less confused than usual, or whether she had a special gift that way, we cannot tell; but she contrived to bring forward appropriate quotations from this remarkable poem, each of which seemed specially adapted to Hahkon's need.

Then, when she saw that his mind was somewhat calmed, she added :

“Thou canst not quit the faith of Odin for that of the new Baldur of the south. Thou art a chosen champion. Odin has chosen thee from the hinds and the peasants. It were a nithing deed to leave his service for yon howling monks. His priests will absolve thee for what thou hast done, and then thou must be ten times more the son of Odin than thou wast.”

“Thou hast ever the right word to say at the right time, good mother,” said Hahkon; but he never made allusion to the fact of his feeling so often a strong conviction of the *truth* of what the English churchmen taught.

Then the woman told him to reach to her an ivory casket made of the tusk of the walrus, then called whale-bone. The sides were curiously carved with

pictures of godlike deeds done by the gods of Valhalla. Odin was there with his mystic ravens, one on each shoulder, whispering to him their tidings brought from earth of the various deeds done by men, by the gods in their homes, and by the pale crew of nithings and evil ghosts, banished to the nether world of the pale goddess Hela. There was the story, on another side, of the descent of Baldur, the son of Odin, and his death by the mistletoe shaft. There was Thor in his chariot, called on earth the thunder, from the din made by its wheels in the heavens. This hero-god was armed with his fearful mallet or hammer, with which he brought the frost giants into subjection. Mortals call that hammer the lightning, because when it is thrown it flashes through the welkin.

In short, each side of this wonderful box was made to tell a story of the gods, showing how they sought the good of men, and how they loved the brave.

Hahkon had never seen this casket before, and could hardly part with it out of his hands, so delighted was he with it now.

Brenda then took a small silver key suspended round her neck by a silken cord, and with some difficulty opened the precious casket.

Great was Hahkon's surprise at finding that it contained twelve plates of solid gold ; in the centre of each a magnificent image in that metal was wrought with cunning skill ; each image represented one of the gods of Valhalla, and around it costly gems were set. The plates were linked together by little rings of gold, so as to form a belt or baldric for a warrior. But the clasp was a burning ruby that blazed like the mid-day sun.

The blind woman took out this gorgeous ornament and displayed it to Hahkon, who was utterly speechless with astonishment.

"My eyes do not tell me of the splendour of this belt, but I judge from thy silence that thou art over-powered with astonishment too great for speech. But that is not all the contents of the box. Raise now what seems to be the bottom, thou wilt find more wonders."

Hahkon obeyed, and found, to his further delight, two arm-rings of solid gold lying under a sort of lid on which the folded belt had lain. Each was adorned with figures of the gods, much smaller than those on the belt, but, like the belt, blazing in precious stones.

Then said old Brenda :

"These gems thou shalt wear when thou art called upon to go to visit Attlé. They were entrusted to my care with other things, gold and many gems to pay me for thy keep. But I have deemed it better to guard these for thy use ; the gold has all been stolen. I only beg thy silence till thou come before Yarl Attlé. I fain would go and have some speech with him of matters that are heavy on my heart."

"But, dear good foster-mother ! who gave these gems to thee ?"

"That I can only darkly guess. But much I think may be discovered of thy birth and lineage if Attlé will but speak. He knows much more than I."

After some further conversation, Hahkon left the bower and descended to the shore. Pondering on what he had heard from Brenda, he walked slowly along the beach, listening to those waves which had not so very long ago seemed to chaunt the same words over and over again, singing :

"Put to sea, put to sea!" The ever-sounding, ever-talking waves, called by the old Scandinavian poets, "daughters of Ægir, god of the sea," seemed to be singing now. What did they say?

With his sheathed sword in his hand, the young sea-warrior paced along, drawing all sorts of figures of runes, of ships, of arms and armour, in the sand, with the socket of the sheath as he went, listening to what Ægir's daughters sang to him?

We cannot put the weird song into human verse. It told him of glory on the waves, of meanness and base thoughts on shore, of the grandeur of the boundless deep, of the great sympathy of the gods with man. And then there rang strangely in his ears the words : "*And God so loved the world, that ——*" What? Had he forgotten where he had heard those words? *How did God love it?* What God? The word God in Denmark meant Odin; in Norway, Thor; and in Sweden, Tyr. But did they *love* the world? Surely that thought was new, he must have brought it from England.

"Strange," he said, "I cannot get those sayings of the monks out of my head; and although they wanted to prove our faith to be wrong and foolish, I cannot turn my thoughts to our brave gods without thinking also on their peaceful Christ; and when I think of *Him* the thought takes up my mind, I wonder how it is! *I cannot hate Him!*"

"Cannot hate whom, Hahkon?" cried a well-known voice from behind. "What! all in the dumps, my champion! Look here, brother, thou hadst best go to England and turn monk!"

"Nonsense, Orm; I am glad, though, thou hast recalled me to myself by that word *monk*. Yes, that

is the strangest thing I have yet met with ; a monk ! By the distaff of Freya, I never dreamt that man could be so womanised. Foul rascals, the monks ! Well, what news ? ”

“ Ships are reported in the offing, seen from the Ness. Old Halvar sounded his horn half-an-hour ago. I met Svend running to take the news to Halfdan, so I ran with him and learnt that there is a fleet approaching.

“ For that good news I'll give thee the first bracelet I take in fight. By-the-by, talking of bracelets, Halfdan liked our scurvy trick upon the English, and when I told him that I felt shame for swearing an oath I did not mean to keep, he sent me from him in high wrath ! ”

“ Hahkon, we will not quarrel. I will never call my foster-brother anything but a wise lad, though his action in this matter is not clever.”

“ Orm, we are men of honour, and that mean trick is worthy of a thief. I shame me that I played it. That *I* should be a Christian ! Woe is me ! woe is me ! ”

“ Art thou very clever now, Hahkon ? I trow not. If thou couldst see thyself thou wouldest blush. I begin to repent me that I mixed my blood with thine. But don't look fierce, man ; I shall only laugh, and that would make things worse.”

“ Say thy say, but do not chafe my mood.”

“ Well, I was talking to old Saxo, whom men call the ‘ Biting Swan ’ (I wonder why), about thy trouble with the English monks, about thy having sworn to Christianity and all the rest of it. I told him how it spoilt thy rest and made thee such a choice companion now.”

"What did old Saxo say? He is right learned in the art of war and all things needful for a warrior's life. What said he? I have faith in him."

"Rolf, in one of his attacks upon the Frankish coast came too far inland, and was almost lost; however, he assured the Franks that a great body of his viking troops were coming up apace, and if Louis harmed him or any of his band, dearly should he abide it. Louis now tried to make them Christians, and promised every man a gift that took the rite of baptism by water. This was liked so well, that many northern viking chiefs of fame became baptized. And Saxo tells me that Yarl Hagbard received the rite just *twenty times*. And every time they gave him fine white raiment, rings, and gold! Now if Yarl Hagbard did a feat like this, and Saxo praises it, I think we ought to try the trick ourselves. We have begun, and as to right and wrong, Saxo declares it right."

After much pleasant talk, the foster-brothers turned their faces to the "Burg," and climbed the hill together on which the fort was built. Thence they could command a fine view of the bay and watch the approaching fleet.

A boat that had descended from the ships now gained the beach below, and Orm and Hahkon watched with true delight the figures of the men who sought the king.

"They are of Attle's train," said Orm.

The two youths hastened to the group, and found amongst those coming from the boat an aged man with very haughty mien and venerable appearance, bearing in his hand a staff covered with runic signs. He gazed upon our friends, and beckoned Hahkon to him with a gesture of his hand. Hahkon approached.

"Art thou the champion Hahkon?"

"Hahkon is my name."

"Attlé the Sea-Wolf would have speech with thee."

"I serve in Halfdan's train. Without his leave I cannot go, but with it I would fain see Attlé, who has waked my soul to war. But for his timely presence on the cliff the day he slew old Hunferth, I should be still a hind."

"And listening to the ba! ba! ba!!! instead of the sharp music of the sword ringing out the stirring song of Hilda," added Orm, gravely.

"What I may do to pleasure Attlé I would gladly do; but still my service is of right King Halfdan's, and without leave from him I cannot quit the home. Ask him, and if he answer yes, I will go with thee back to Tredalund and do Yarl Attlé's bidding.

"Comest thou with us to King Halfdan?"

"No; I shall be in 'bower' with my mother."

The herald smiled, but not contemptuously, and said: "We shall see Halfdan, and I think thy trip to Attlé will be settled without great trouble on our part. Perhaps it is as well thou art not with us; but stay thou with thy mother until thou hearest more from me."

The herald now moved on, leaving both Orm and Hahkon much surprised.

"I care not if I go with him," said Hahkon. "Halfdan is gloomy. Since the defeat in England, life has become a curse. I almost think the gods are wroth with us!"

"Never be gloomy, man! The landing in England might have been worse, friend Hahkon. I sold the ring the Christian put upon my finger for just one

hundred öras. That was a noble sum for such a little bauble. Brenda says the mantles which they gave us are of such fine cloth as never has been in Sweden. I told her of the colour ; she says that, being belted warriors, we cannot now wear white, but they will dye, she says, and we must have them crimson."

Much conversation followed, and gently walking on, the foster-brothers reached the "house," and going to the bower through the yard, were soon within the chamber where old Brenda lived. She knew their tread before they reached her door, and seemed surprised at Hahkon's quick return.

"How now, my son?" she said. "Back to thy foster-mother? Well, I am glad to see thee ; what chance has brought thee here so soon?"

Hahkon now told her of the herald's coming and of the fleet in sight, and how the messenger had warned him to rest with Brenda till the king should send and order Hahkon to his presence.

"Then will my dream come true," replied the vala in impassioned tones. "It is the will of Odin. Prepare to leave King Halfdan, boys ; but there is danger everywhere! I saw red lances flying in my dream, and that betokens dangers."

Hahkon laughed. "Thanks for thy dream, dear mother. And now methinks I understand the runic song of Ægir the sea-god's daughters."

We will not pry further into this conversation between Brenda and the boys, but pay a flying visit to the king in hall.

There he is, on the high bank ; the herald is sitting near him. At his right hand sits Yarl Yalmar. Other yarls and champions are also on the daïs. Six fair-haired maidens are engaged in watching the

gold-tipped mead-horns and replenishing them as the warriors empty them.

The king is greatly excited, but wears more of the look of Halfdan the Merry than he has done since his return from England.

"I well believe the story; and it were a nithing deed to say Yarl Attlé nay. It irks me that his wounds are so severe. Full willingly would I have come to see him, but there is very pressing work on hand. I cannot leave the Burg. Send straight, some one, a messenger to widow Brenda's rooms, and if her foster-son be there, bring him in haste to me."

A messenger was soon dispatched, who quickly returned bringing Hahkon with him.

"We parted in some anger," said the king. "Halfdan the Merry is, I fear me, dead, and the grim Halfdan brooks no trifling. Let it pass. My friend and stout ally, Yarl Attlé, lies wounded on his bed. It seems he craves to see thee, and has sent this reverend herald to ask thy presence at his couch of pain. Once I refused to send thee at his wish, but now the times are changed. Not only shalt thou go, but Orm shall travel with thee. Besides, as Brenda is a skilful leech, she shall go too and see Yarl Attlé, and help him in his need."

Then turning to Yarl Yalmar, he continued :

"Give orders that the dragon-ship just fitted out for sea be known as Hahkon's. Let such men as will, hang out their shields around her bulwarks. See that there be no rope-yarn wanting to make the dragon worthy of my fleet."

Then, as the trusty Yalmar left the hall, he said to Hahkon with his former laugh,

"Ha! said I well, my hearty? Go to the Sea-
K

Wolf's home and greet him lovingly from me. This ancient man has told me a strange tale, and by the rune-staff in his hand, Attlé accredits him to tell it me. I tell thee nothing of these things; Attlé may do it better!"

"Great king," said Hahkon, "I do not deserve——"

"Of course not," answered Halfdan. "Never mind; time is but short, and there is more to do than prating. I know not if thy skill afloat will warrant thy taking command of men; but Yalmar shall go with thee (if he will), and help thee with advice. Wilt thou not pleasure me so far, friend Yalmar?"

A bright smile from the bright yarl, who had just returned, was sufficient answer. Halfdan, in northern fashion, stretched forth his hand to Yalmar, and a stout hand-grip told each more than words.

They both loved Hahkon, and the herald's tale had deeply interested them. With heart and soul they seemed determined to do all they could to further the youth's welfare. But when he spoke, and tried to thank the king, he was prevented, and, so to speak, was shuffled off the daïs.

"Tell thy mother that she shall go with thee on the expedition; and, hark thee, friend, hasten to prepare her for her trip. Now, quick! March! No talking; that is waste of time. I myself will ask the Lady Freydisa to give her every aid, and damsels for her train. The mother of a belted warrior must fare in fitting wise. See to it, Hahkon, and be quick."

Two days after this scene on the daïs, a glittering dragon, with twelve oars, called after Frithioff's ship, "Ellida," swam proudly out of the bay, and saluting the headland as she passed, was soon lost sight of by the crowd that gazed upon her.

Two days later "Ellida" was anchored off Tredalund. The watchman on the look-out signalled to the next station, "strange sail," and this man passed the signal to the next until it reached the yard and hall of Attlé. There, exhausted with much suffering, lay the dreaded Sea-Wolf on a rude couch, on which a bear's skin had been stretched. Over him was flung his mantle, and at his bed's side stood a leech, a priestess, and his favourite skald.

The signal was a note on the horn, which the outer warden blew, and was repeated by the various watchmen in turn, until the last ran to the sick man's chamber, and brought him the tidings thus :

"Yarl Attlé! the signal has been blown, a ship has reached the bay."

The hero raised himself, and asked, in a voice that was but a faint echo of that with which he had been wont to strike terror into the heart of the foe, "How many ships have come?"

"One only has been signalled."

"Go to thy post again and hearken, and bring me word if others come in sight."

But before the man could leave, another came in, running, with the news that a second ship had come in sight.

And the warrior raised himself upon the couch, and said to the messenger :

"Ride swiftly to the outmost ward and see what ships they are. Tell Glum, the steward, to give thee fleet steed. And, hark thee, friend, bring me back tidings, if thou canst, what ships they are, and all about them."

The man was gone, and the grim Sea-Wolf lay down exhausted, as it seemed, with the exertion he

had made. Growling, he lay down like the fell beast whose name he bore. Then the skald took his harp and sang the following rude lay :

“ When Thor would quell the giants,
He thundered through the air,
And his mighty mallet, ‘ Myelnor,’ *
Flashed lightnings everywhere.

“ The mountain monsters trembled
As they saw the golden gleam,
And they freed the icy fetters
That bound each silver stream.

“ They thought that through the torrents
No warrior god could wade ;
But Thor, he laughed in thunder,
And bared his lightning blade.

“ And he hurled his heavy hammer,
Through field and flood he sprang,
On the giants’ icy helmets
The wondrous weapon rang.

“ And down to death and darkness
Those sons of Loki † sank,
And the foulest fens of Nasstrand ‡
Their black blood sucked and drank.

“ Then grass grew green in Midgárd, §
Gone were the ice and snow,
And the frost and cold were banished
To the dread depths below.

“ And now, when care or sickness
Harass the human heart,
At a flash from mighty Myelnor,
The fiendish foes depart !”

* The mythological name for Thor’s hammer. It is represented by the lightning, and is typical of divine activity against evil and falsehood.

† The evil principle in Valhalla, who was expelled and became the father of evil, typified by the giants.

‡ The lower world, the abode of those who in life did evil.

§ The earth. Winter and cold are evil. Warmth and light are from the gods.

This lay seemed greatly to delight Attlé, who ordered a rich reward to be given to the skald for his song. Some of his former vigour returned, as he said : "I would that the Thunderer might send a flash of his wondrous mallet through me, and chase away these shadows. Would that I had fallen in fight. I like not dying on a couch ; such a death beseems not a northern yarl ! Clouds of arrows, clang of bucklers, roaring of the boiling waves, flashes from the spear heads, sun-beams shot from the sword, these are the sights and sounds to make the champion of Odin welcome Valhalla."

"Great Yarl," said the leech ; "if the herb gathered under the new moon, and nine times seethed in the cauldron, do its work, thou shalt yet lead hosts to the field of slaughter, to be chosen to be fitting warriors for Valhalla."

Then spoke the priest and said,

"And if the wondrous herb should not avail, and this couch is doomed to be thy bed of death, then hast thou yet naught to fear, for the wound of which thou diest was gathered in the fight. It is a lawful and becoming death for the brave sons of war."

"Thou art right kind and noble, and I thank thee for the words. I doubt not thy knowledge of the faith of Odin ; still, I would rather fall amid the clang of weapons than die a straw-death like a Chapman-slave. Still, if I may not rise from this couch to lead the sons of Odin home to their father, I will carve the spear-head letter on my breast and go to him like a hero."

Here another messenger arrived, reporting two ships, one of which was recognised as "Grané," which had sailed with the herald ; but she was accompanied

by a gallant dragon, quite unknown to any of the scouts.

New life seemed to be infused into Attlé's veins at these words. He made another effort to rise, and the excitement of his thoughts, the soothing nature of the skald's song, the comfort spoken by the priest, combined to lend him supernatural strength. He rose and walked from the "bower" where he had lain, and assisted by the priest and the skald, passed through the court and entered the grand hall of his fathers.

Here he found many of his retainers, who were glad enough to see their valiant lord well enough to return to them. There was a perfect roar of "Health to thee, Attlé!" as he entered, and the mead-horns were filled and emptied with a rapidity now happily forgotten.

"Fill me a horn of wine," he cried. "May but this weakness pass, and all shall go well again." He ascended the daïs, where a huge horn was brought to him, well filled with wine of the rarest vintage from the sunny south; and this, despite the wishes of the leech, he drained at a draught to the health of his champions then and there assembled, and to the gods.

Greatly refreshed and excited, he thought himself able to walk down to the beach, and aided by the priest and skald, he accomplished the journey in time to witness the debarkation in smaller boats of the passengers and of part of the crew of the stranger dragon; and he was not a little surprised to see his own herald amongst those brought ashore in the first boat. His sense of dignity and his feeling of pride, however, forbade his waiting there to receive the visitors in the open air. He was therefore led back

to the hall, where, seated on the high bank, he awaited the coming of the guests.

Although the distance from the hall to the headland, where the look-out who first discerned the new comers had been stationed, was considerable, the actual landing place in the bay was within an easy walk of the building, and Yarl Attlé, notwithstanding his impatience, did not find the time too dreary until the arrival of a party of new comers accompanying his herald was announced.

First there appeared two belted warriors of his own train, leading between them a young champion armed, except the pansar or shirt of mail. He wore a blue tunic trimmed with gold, blue cloth trousers bound round from the knee to the ankle with a trellis work of red leather. On his head was the ring helmet or leathern head-piece, strengthened round the rim with an iron hoop, and two half-hoops crossing each other at the apex. To the sides of the helmet were fitted the enormous eagle pinions, worn to show that the proud warrior was a champion of Odin.

After him followed a gallant train, Attlé's herald taking the lead, and in the train was an old woman who was followed by two maidens of exquisite beauty, each laden with some article or other which could not be easily distinguished. But if Attlé had been able to see everything borne by that band of visitors, or had he been suddenly endowed with supernatural powers enabling him to see all the wonders of creation, he would have been unable to attend to any other sight than that on which his gaze was fixed, and that was a gorgeous belt of gold and gems worn by the warrior foremost of the band, a youthful champion, who yet seemed to

walk with a more haughty and warlike stride than any in the throng.

Attlé gazed in wonder at this appearance, as though it had really been a visitor from the other world.

He rose from his seat on the high bank as though to ask some question of the youth, but fell backwards, and was caught by two of his attendants just in time to prevent his actual fall to the floor of the daïs.

His men bore him to his chamber, where the bear-skin couch was spread ; and there he lay for nearly an hour before the leech would permit him to receive any one. At last, Hahkon, Orm, the herald, Yarl Yalmar, Brenda, and her maidens were admitted.

"And who art thou ?" he cried, as our hero entered and stood at the side of the couch. "Who gave thee that belt ? Whence came those arm-rings ?"

"So please thee, Yarl Attlé," said the youth, "I had the belt from my foster-mother Brenda, who gave them to me the day before I sailed, obeying thy behest. King Halfdan bade me greet thee, and sends thee these gifts by me, and hopes thy wounds are healing."

Here Hahkon beckoned to certain servitors, who bore rich presents from the king.

Courteously Yarl Attlé spoke, and thanked the bearers and the giver of these gifts, but never looked at them. His gaze rested on the splendid belt, or wandered to the champion's face. He saw no other objects in the room, heard nothing but the voice of Hahkon. At last he said in trembling accents :

"Pray tell me how that belt became thine. Whence came those arm-rings ? Who art thou ? Much hangs upon thy answer, gentle youth ; but in the name of all the gods, be quick to answer me !"

"Yarl Attlé," said young Hahkon, "I have said how little I can tell thee of these things. If it should please thee, I am more than glad to lay them at thy feet, as matters better befitting a great yarl as thou, than a mere soldier like myself. But I have brought my foster-mother here, who will right gladly tell thee how she obtained these things, for she gave them to me."

"Let the good Brenda speak," said Attlé, "only bid her be brief. I cannot bear this fierce impatience that rages in my heart!"

In a few words the good old woman told the tale of how the belted warrior sought her cot some fifteen years agone and gave an infant to her charge, telling her that her reward should be immense if she brought up the child as her own offspring. Her husband was at sea, and the tall warrior seemed to know him; and then the babe looked up at her and smiled. She swore to guard him, and to bring him up as hers.

The time passed on; the child was never claimed. Her husband was drowned at sea; just as the warrior said young Hahkon's father was. Bad times came on them; she herself grew blind; but amidst all her grief she kept the precious things that warrior had given until some days ago; when, hearing that King Halfdan meant to give a ship to Hahkon, she thought he ought to have the belt.

"In what hast thou preserved these precious things?" asked Attlé, very gently.

"In this box, wherein they were enclosed when they were brought to me."

She spoke, and called a maiden to her with a packet in her hand. She moved the cloth that wrapped it, and disclosed the casket we have told

our readers of. Besides the casket she produced a scarf, white as the snow; but in the corner there was a star embroidered, a helmet, and a sword.

When Attlé saw the casket and the scarf, he seemed as though about to swoon again. But rousing himself with effort, he looked around, until his glance rested upon Yarl Yalmar.

"Yarl," he cried, "come here: Thou art a man of honour; friend to the king and me. Bear witness to my words. Hahkon is my son. When quite a babe I lost him. I was told a wolf had killed his mother, sleeping near the sea, and borne away the boy. True, my wife was killed; but never, as I thought, by wolfish fangs; she had been strangled. That scarf I gave her. That casket was her own; the belt and bracelets both were mine; and the bluff warrior who left him in Brenda's care was my unworthy brother. Thou knowest, Yalmar, he was drowned at sea! just as he feigned that Hahkon's father had been lost. His son, of the same age as Hahkon, I have named my heir, thinking that I was childless. Call in my train and freemen to the hall; I will present my Hahkon. Come hither, lad!"

Hahkon approached, having laid aside his helmet, and was about to kneel at Attlé's feet; but Attlé prevented him. He pressed him to his heart, but all he said was:

"Thou art very like her! she was passing fair!"

He then thanked Brenda, and made Hahkon swear to grant her land and dwelling, with enough to keep her in great comfort with her maids, that she might live in peace, and die an honoured and respected dame.

After a little rest he felt strong enough to pass

into the hall, where many of his champions already were assembled. To these he presented Hahkon as his son. He made a short address, concluding very nearly in these terms :

"Thus my lost boy is found. Thorkell, my nephew, whom I named my heir, thinking I had no son, must now give up his claims. But I would have it known that during my son's absence Thorkell rules, and should my boy be slain, or die and leave no children, the lands then go to Thorkell. To this ye all are witness."

This was received with loud applause ; but again Attlé was so fatigued that he had to be borne back to the bower by Orm and Hahkon, who would allow no one else to touch his father.

Very holy was the feeling between those two. To Hahkon it seemed at first like madness to suppose that the grand viking, dreaded through the North and worshipped as a god by Hahkon, could be his father ! that he could be Yarl Attlé's son ! It seemed impossible, and yet he knew it to be true. He felt it in his heart. He never had seen Attlé without a sort of awe mixed with such a kind of love as stirred the soul within him. Attlé had been his idol, his dream, his standard of perfection, and now he was his father !

But it was very plain to all men in the train that their lord's days were short. The leech said nothing, Brenda shook her head. The Sea-Wolf's day was done.

Before he died he said to Hahkon : "Do not grieve. Above there still is room for many champions, and we shall meet again, ride side by side on proud Valhalla's plains, and live in joy with Odin.

Fain had I borne my part with thee and Halfdan in a raid on England. But thou must go alone. Down with the English, Hahkon! Slay them, as they slew the British! Cut down the Christian! Warrior or monk; it makes no difference, cut the reptile down. And hear me, Hahkon! I am slain by them. Avenge me! If I may not live to give thee that sweet love that only fathers know, if thou art robbed by these same curs of Christians of thy dear father's life, thou still canst live for vengeance. Spare them not, nor age nor sex, nor priest nor monk, slay all, cut the hounds down. It is thy sacred duty."

In fierce excitement he had raised himself on his couch, but the strain was too great; a torrent of blood issued from mouth and nostrils as he fell back. He held out his hand to Hahkon, who seized it in his own. Attlé gripped him convulsively, and murmured, "Revenge—slay—Christians." Then he revived a moment; life flickered up before the lamp went out, and he said in clear and solemn tones that never faltered:

"Swear on my sword revenge upon the Christians; swear to root out the English. Ravage their coasts, burn their towns, sow their fields with salt. Let the Raven of Odin tear down the cross. Swear to thy father, swear!"

"I swear," said Hahkon, "never to sheath the sword until thou art well avenged; and when we meet above in Odin's halls, thou shalt say, Well done, my son!"

The Sea-Wolf seized a knife, and had just time to carve the spear's head on his breast, when he fell back and all was over.



"'I SWEAR,' SAID MAHKON, 'NEVER TO SHEATH THE SWORD UNTIL THOU ART WELL AVENGED.'" —P. 156.



CHAPTER IX.

HOW HAHKON ENTERED UPON HIS INHERITANCE.

THE burial of Yarl Attlé the Sea-Wolf was one of the most splendid that had ever been known in the North. By his command a ship with oars and mast, completely equipped for war, had been brought on shore and raised upon a headland overlooking the bay of Tredalund. It had been placed on the plateau or table land which crowned the Ness, and all things requisite for a warrior's life were placed within, to serve him in Valhalla. The mighty drinking horn he loved to drain was there, as well as the stoup or bucket with its golden hoops. In short, nothing was omitted that might serve his need. When all was ready, the body of the warrior, sitting in the chair on which in life he used to sit, was borne in solemn state on board. Here it was placed in the stern, the cold right hand upon the huge tiller, and the left resting on the tremendous battle-sword. On the mast before him were grouped his shield, his spear, his axe and javelins, in the same order as that in which they had been grouped in hall behind his back. Below this group his shirt of linked mail was made to stand by means of a stout cross of wood fixed upon the deck, and this was surmounted by the warrior's leathern cap with the blood-red comb upon it ; the gold-bound helmet he wore upon his head, and the broad eagle-pinions spread high above him. His tawny beard hung down to his waist ; and he wore a

splendid belt, similar in size and magnificence to that preserved for Hahkon in the carved casket. From a more simple belt hung his knife or dagger, and a pouch or pocket, in which was the dainty comb to keep the beard and exquisite hair in the order of which the Northern warriors were so justly proud.

Never had a grander or more solemn sight been seen than that martial figure sitting dead at the stern of his war-ship.

The last of the precious things buried with the Sea-Wolf was his trusty steed, saddled and harnessed as if for battle, and then all was ready; and while dirges were sung by priests, with a chorus of voices of priestesses and warriors, the mound was built up in a huge dome-like form over ship and steed and champion.

As the sun sank to rest behind the western hills, the last green sod of turf was placed on the mound by Hahkon, and then, as son and heir to the dreaded Attlé, he entered into full possession of his father's land and dwelling.

On the death of Attlé the warriors of his train had removed their shields and weapons from the walls, and, at the time appointed by Yarl Yalmar, they all appeared in the hall fully armed for war. This was to show that, in case of any of the band not liking the new yarl, they were free to carry their arms elsewhere. Outside the hall were grouped the inferior retainers, and the followers of the richer landowners, who had held their lands on military tenure from Yarl Attlé, as he had held his from Halfdan.

Yarl Yalmar was present in the name of the king as his hertog (general) and friend, to introduce the

new yarl to his retainers ; and when he appeared on the dais, between the two massive pillars which supported the roof, and graced each side of the "high bank," or throne, of the departed yarl, leading Hahkon in armour, with his helmet garnished with the eagle's wings, and bound round with the broad ring distinctive of his rank, the applause was tremendous. For, standing there between Thor and Odin (into whose images the pillars had been roughly carved), he looked like Frey standing between the two chief gods of Valhalla.

In a few short sentences Yarl Yalmar told the assembled champions how Attlé had found and recognised his son, whom he (Yalmar) now presented to them as their future lord, to the exclusion of Yarl Thorkell, whose former nomination as Attlé's successor had only been conditional, on the failure of all efforts to find the true heir now before them.

He then recounted Hahkon's deeds from the time when he slew the bear down to the escape from England with the rings, white raiment, and other gifts. When he had finished there was great applause thundered forth from the shields, after which each man, in silence, bore shield and weapons back to the peg to which they belonged, and then presented himself for the ceremony of swearing fealty to the new lord, which was performed in the following manner.

Hahkon descended from the high bank and drew his sword ; this, with a powerful thrust, he stuck upright in the floor of the hall. All the champions now passed round in order before him, so that the right hand of each should be near the upright weapon in passing. Then he halted, and stretching his hand out over the hilt grasped that of Hahkon, which was

extended to him. Then he exclaimed, in a loud clear voice : "I swear to follow Yarl Hahkon as I followed his father, in all his just wars ; and as part of his Herban, to follow King Halfdan, of Framness. This I solemnly swear upon the sword. So help me Thor and Odin !"

To which Hahkon replied, "I swear to give thee food, shelter, and arms, as thou mayest have need ; to grant thee the land held by thee from my father, so that thou mayest possess thine own fully, and leave it to thy son on the same tenure. So help me Thor and Odin. Likewise my trusty sword !"

This having been performed with all present excepting with Orm (who, having drunk brotherhood with Hahkon, was "out of it"), Hahkon remounted the daïs, and taking a huge horn of wine in his right hand, drank to the gods, to the memory of his father, to Halfdan the king, and finally to his warriors all.

The steward had provided plenty of mead, and the damsels of the household now appeared with great jars of mead and horns for the champions to drink health and good luck to Hahkon the yarl.

This was done right heartily, and Hahkon, Yarl Yalmar, and Orm, sat on the high bank together, presiding over a mighty feast ; for which a large number of wild boars had been slaughtered, many birds of very various kinds had been prepared for the table, while bread and mead were provided in astonishing quantities.

The warriors sat all round the hall, with their backs to their shields, and their faces to the fire, which glowed almost as red as they, in the centre of the floor. Between the table and the fire the

cooks and servitors passed and repassed, but no warriors sat with their backs to the fire. Behind them, between their seats and the tapestry that adorned the walls, passed the maidens with golden locks, to pour out the golden mead into the horns of the joyous champions.

In the central place were the skalds or the minstrels with their harps, singing the praises of the Sea-Wolf or the deeds of his son. The warriors drank to the memory of the departed hero, and to the success of the inheritor of his fame and power. Speeches were made, and more of the brown mead was consumed than had ever been drunk at one sitting during the old yarl's lifetime, and he was no niggard either! All night they sat and feasted, and when the red dawn came they filled again and drank to the goddess Eostra (called Easter by the English), the queen and wife of the dawn, mistress of Spring.

Three days after this grand festival, the elders of the host proclaimed a Ting, or parliament, to meet on the dead man's grave.

Three granite blocks, of enormous size, had been rolled to the top of the mound, where they formed an enormous table, on which young Hahkon took his stand, and pointed with his sword north, east, and west, demanding that if any existed who could dispute his claim to the inheritance upon which he had entered, they should now appear.

He then blew his horn, and stood waiting very proudly on the horizontal slab, little expecting a reply to the challenge. The champions stood in rings round the side of the mound, and for some distance around the flat surface of the top of the Ness glittered with spear heads. It was like a field

of corn whose golden ears had been changed to steel.

But not a sound was heard. Had a dagger dropped from its sheath, it would have been noticed amidst that death-like stillness, and Hahkon was at last about to speak, when the faint tones of a horn seemed to come borne upon the western breeze. Hahkon started, the warriors drew themselves up as the sound reached them, and turning their backs on Hahkon, seemed ready to repel any attack that might be made upon the young hero whom they had all sworn to defend.

And it would have been a daring act in any to have attacked that "forest of ash tipped with grey," as the poets would call the mass of spears grasped by those doughty warriors. It was a war meeting, and spears were borne, whereas, in general, the sword was the only weapon admitted to these assemblies.

At last a small group of horsemen was discerned riding in the direction of the funeral mound where the dead chief slept below, with hundreds of his living vassals watching above to guard his son from wrong.

In short space the little group approached the mound, and an aged warrior, who seemed to be their leader, dismounted from his horse, and assisted a slim boyish person to dismount.

The latter was a youth of some fourteen or fifteen winters. He was clad in arms; that is to say, he wore sword and shield, as well as the cap with the red comb peculiar to the Scandinavians and English. But he wore no mail, nor had he the helmet with the eagle's plumes, and it was evident that he was no belted warrior, for the belt that marked the rank was absent. He carried his head fairly erect, but not

boldly, and when led by the aged warrior to the foot of the grave, after they had dismounted from their horses, he looked rather like a maiden disguised as a boy, than a real hero seeking fame in arms.

One of the heralds now asked the ancient champion whom and what he sought ?

"Whom I seek, is Yalmar the yarl. What I seek, is justice !"

Then answered Yalmar, "Both are here ; I am Yarl Yalmar, and justice is in every part of the Ting ; so say thy say."

"I learn that thou art here in King Halfdan's stead, with powers to act for him. Is that true ?"

"Most true ; and I shall act as I believe he would have acted had he himself been here. Say on."

"I bring Yarl Thorkell, heir of Attlé the Golden, appointed by the dead warrior to assume his style and guide his yarldom, after his decease. Here stands the rightful heir ; and we, his witnesses, have come to prove what Attlé Sigurdson did wish, and ordered to be done after his death."

"Sir herald," said Yarl Yalmar, "answer this."

Then the grave herald, with his snow-white beard and flowing silver locks replied, and showed distinctly how the dead Sea-Wolf had mourned his long lost son ; how, fearing he was dead, he had decreed Thorkell should be his heir ; this, however, had been conditional. The words of Attlé's order were, that failing Hahkon, Thorkell should succeed, but only rule for him as in his absence. Now, beyond all doubt, Attlé died convinced that he had found his son, to whom he left his power.

After this explanation, all the air resounded with the clangour of sword-blades beaten against the metal

portions of the shields. When this applause subsided, the stranger herald spoke :

"I cannot doubt that you believe all this ; but I do not. I know that Yarl Attlé gave his land and power to Thorkell, son of his dead brother. That yonder youth is Hahkon we dispute, and claim a trial."

Then spoke Hahkon :

"On my father's mound I here have summoned you who doubt my claim openly to appear, and ye have come. For this I thank you ; it is right and fitting that all things should be open on a free-man's land. But the dispute is mortal. No civil trial sets aside the will of northern chieftains. We are met in arms. The trial that ye ask shall be in arms, here on my father's grave, before his might assembled. I challenge thee, Yarl Thorkell, to the fight. Form a square yonder on the even plain, and I will meet the accuser with sword, and spear, and axe, and hammer. Bring me my horse ! Give him a horn of wine ! "

Thorkell did not seem much to relish the proposal ; however, it was so warmly greeted by Hahkon's men, and so completely in the spirit of the age, that servitors were already moving off to enclose a space for the battle, or rather duel, when Yalmar cried :

"Yarls ! I forbid the fight. Hahkon and Thorkell, sons of brothers, fight ! Forbid it, Odin ! Are the warriors mad ? Likely enough Hahkon is more prepared to try the question with the lance's point, and were they any other than relations, I would have bade them fight ; but I forbid the lists. As the messenger from Halfdan, I forbid all quarrels between these two youths. The king receives Yarl Hahkon as the dead Sea-Wolf wished ; champion, or herald, or

whatever you may be, your suit is vain. Hahkon is lord of Tredalund."

This was received with great applause, and even the herald upon Thorkell's side seemed struck. At last he said,

"I grant, if yonder youth be really Hahkon, that Thorkell's suit is lost. But I require proof."

"The proofs were laid before Yarl Attlé and the king, who found them most sufficient. By the king's orders I am here to see the vassals of the yardom take the oath of fealty to him. The oath is sworn already; Thorkell arrives too late. Hahkon is yarl, and ye have lost your suit."

Then Hahkon spoke once more: "Warriors and chiefs!" he said, "we stand in presence of the mighty gods, and in the hearing of my father's shade, whose death I must avenge. Ye have been called together, warriors, not as a peaceful band to laugh and jest and play at tables, but to debate on *war!* War! War to the death with England! Deeply I swore on my dead father's sword vengeance on England! Now, my chosen friends, choose whom ye will to lead you, Hahkon or Thorkell. I abide your choice. Which shall it be?"

There was a shout that rent the very air of, "Hahkon! Hahkon. Hahkon the bear-slayer. Hahkon the belted yarl. Hahkon the warrior who has saved his king!"

When the shouts had subsided, Yalmar took the word.

"Methinks, brave champions, that your choice is right. Yarl Hahkon burns to be revenged on England, while Thorkell shows few signs of warlike fire. Still, as Yarl Attlé thought it wise and right to

let Yarl Thorkell rule when Hahkon was away, I think we ought to give him just the post that the good Attlé gave. Let him be steward, then, until your yarl returns; should Hahkon pass to Odin while away, the yardom goes to Thorkell, as he said."

This was received with such universal applause as to leave no chance of reply.

Then Hahkon, stretching forth his hand to Thorkell, exclaimed: "It is decided, Thorkell, and was decided by my father for us. It skills us not to quarrel! Give me thy hand! We must be friends, not foes; Yarl Yalmar, for the king, bids us not be foes; by Thor! we *must* be friends. Hang not thy head, man! I can understand how much it irks thee to remain on land. But if I should return laden with English gold, I'll give thee such a dragon as shall make thee king of fifty times the space in water that I command on shore. Cheer up, my lad! Thy name shall yet be great, and strike a terror in the English heart. What sayest thou?"

"I say," said Thorkell, "that I have not dined! These fellows here have made me ride like mad to reach the Ting. What for? It seems that thou art Yarl, not I. As to the dragon, I care not for sea! Give me the firm earth under foot, I say! Go thou to England, by all means, and get thy head broke by the beef-fed islanders. I'll not gainsay thee, Hahkon; go, and welcome; only let somebody order dinner for me and these rough riders."

It is impossible to convey any idea of Hahkon's disgust at this unwarlike speech. He turned away contemptuously, withdrawing his outstretched hand as if he feared contagion.

"Orm," he said, "take Thorkell and give him food; meanwhile I speak my Ting."

The warriors convoked in that assembly regarded this scene and heard these words in mute astonishment. The elder of the troop that had accompanied Thorkell scowled around and left the grave, accompanied by Orm, who led the little band to the hall.

Nothing could have been more opportune for Hahkon than the appearance of Thorkell. There had been some among the retainers who had thought it rather hard on the latter to be deprived of what he had been led to consider his inheritance. But the contrast between the two youths was so striking, that now even those who had been somewhat inclined towards Thorkell were completely cured of any lurking kindness for him.

The actual business of the meeting was now gone into by Hahkon in a flashing, glowing speech against the English. The influence of filial love, and the excitement produced by all the rapid events of the last few weeks, had obliterated from his mind all thought of Christian teaching. His father's death, resulting from wounds given by "Christian hounds," and "pudding-fed pigs of English," had awakened a rage in his heart that had, like a mighty torrent, swept all feelings away before it, leaving no room for any other thought than revenge. The last few words of his oration will serve to show the point of view from which he regarded his duty to his worshipped father.

"I call upon you, therefore, by the oath sworn to me on my sword, by the duty ye owed my glorious father, by the memory of his fame, by your fealty to good King Halfdan, by your faith in Odin, by the

laws of war, to join me in this work. And this I swear, by all the gods above us, especially by Var, who writes men's oaths upon her silver shield, never to sheath the sword against the English dogs! They dread the Danish name; we are all Danes to them! But in us they shall find such Danes as shall check their hearts' beating to hear of! Red is our flag on the war track, and black is the Raven of Odin that flutters in wrath from the mast. Let that show that our march is in blood, and the hopes of our foes are as black, aye, blacker than Odin's dread bird! War to the knife with the English. Sow salt in their cornfields and blood in their homes! Wherever a sword sows the seeds of the grave, on plain or billow, there my blade shall gleam! I am but a boy in years, and ye are sage warriors already. But the fire of Odin is in me. My father's spirit lives again in me. And Attlé's fury shall nerve Hahkon's arm. Be ye my wisdom and I will be your rage!"

Grand was the applause with which this speech was welcomed. The whole spirit was that of the North of those days, and joyously was it echoed by the men of blows and blood who heard it. To them the English were specially hateful; first because, although of the Scandinavian race, they had severed themselves more and more from their brethren of the North, until they had become a race apart. Unmixed with the aboriginal Britons, at enmity with the Danes and amongst themselves; their Christianity seemed to other races quite to cut them off, and put them beyond the pale of international feelings. The Britons hated them worse than ever for entering the Church, their absence from which had formed so strong a

ground of comfort for the vanquished, who might still boast that although driven to the rocks and mountains by the English, they (the British) were immensely superior to them in being Christians ! The removal of this source of consolation the Britons never forgave ; but their anger or dislike had been little regarded by the more stalwart English, who looked upon them with the same kind of haughty contempt as that with which Englishmen now regard the aborigines of any place they colonise. But by no people were the English so hated as by their own Scandinavian brethren, all of whom they called (as they had once called themselves) Danes.

So there was no difficulty in arranging a party of fierce warriors to proceed with fire and sword to England, and prove, by dint of blows, how superior the creed of Odin was to that of the Christian.

Hahkon was too much taken up with the various duties which now devolved upon him to pay very much attention to his cousin Thorkell, save that orders were given that he should be well entertained. The warriors who accompanied him had, on finding how pacific his temperament was, all asked to serve under Hahkon, and had been admitted of his band, with the exception of the elder, who had been the spokesman of the party, and he withdrew from Tredalund without farewell or thanks, which was scant courtesy.

And the bright June sun played lovingly over the fleet, all being in readiness to sail, when news was brought to Hahkon of the approach of a much larger fleet than his own. The men on the look-out stations had descried them in the offing, and there was great excitement on board "Ellida" and the other ships at

this news. Hahkon's fleet formed a half-moon, corresponding with the shape of Tredalund bay, and so awaited the strangers, who, about three hours after mid-day approached the bay in the wedge formation greatly affected by the English, so that the idea spread amongst Hahkon's men that they were to be attacked by an English fleet, at which they rejoiced.

But they rejoiced as much when they saw Odin's raven and Halfdan's flag flying from the masts; then they understood why Yarl Yalmar had remained so long with Hahkon at Tredalund. The two fleets joined.

The wind was fair, the men in high spirits, and a week after their departure from Tredalund saw them in the Thames. Their numbers had been increased by other viking ships, and they together formed an army of Danes against which it was difficult for the English king Ethelwulf to act, as he was fighting the Britons under Roderick.

It was a favourable moment for the Danes, who attacked the English with merciless rage. However, "Ealhere, with the men of Kent, and Hada, with those of Surrey, overwhelmed the invaders with the first fury of their battle; but the conflict was obstinately renewed, the English chiefs fell, and after many of both armies had been slain or drowned, the pirates obtained the victory."

Foremost among the warriors the young Yarl was conspicuous, not only for his dress and splendid appointments, but for his almost unearthly ferocity. Mounted on a black war-horse, he, with the national axe (called the Danish axe all through Europe) cut down all before him; and when fatigue caused him to relax in his exertions, he coolly hung the mighty weapon at his saddle-bow, and continued the battle

with his sword. The English host, cut down to a small band of valiant men, was lost ; some of the number contrived to retreat, others had been taken by certain Danes with a view to future ransom. When King Halfdan the Grim heard of this, he sent for the vikings and remonstrated with them for disobeying orders. At this they laughed, saying that they obeyed no other law than that of their own free will and pleasure. So Halfdan ordered them and the prisoners to be put to the sword.

The Northmen under Halfdan destroyed all the towns and villages in their way, until they learnt that Ethelwulf was advancing to meet them with the West Saxons and Mercians, therefore they embarked in their dragons, taking with them immense spoil from the churches, and from the houses of the wealthy English. Never had so much wealth been taken out of England.

When they were on board their ships again, after having been three weeks on shore burning, slaying, destroying, and ravaging, they hardly knew how to bestow the quantities of wealth which they had taken ; and when they reached the channel, and were fairly out at sea, Halfdan called the leaders of the ships to him, and debated with them on the disposal of the spoil. The ornaments, arms, and bracelets which he had taken he distributed amongst them, and advised them to divide their plunder among their men, keeping a tithe for a common fund for the building of ships. This was agreed to, and they all sailed home with glee.

But Orm and Hahkon cared not to remain on shore. They begged King Halfdan to allow them to sail forth on the viking path together.

Halfdan was in his merry mood when the two youths came before him in the open Ting at Framness, and greeted them with right good will.

"So!" he cried, as they approached the assembly, "ye have come, as true retainers, to my Ting, before I sent for you. All the more welcome. Service profered is better than service claimed. But ye have doubtless some request; say what ye lack, and if my hand can help you, there it is! Say I well, champions? or is it too much?"

Then Hahkon addressed the king:

"We fain would seek adventures in the south; we both have heard that yonder, midst the islands, there lie bright golden shrines. We long to see the place to which the swallows fly when they leave us."

"Boys always yearn to know more than old men can tell; but what if I refuse to let you go?"

"Of that we never thought," said Hahkon, "for Halfdan has always been a friend to us as to Yarl Attlé. I, as the Sea-Wolf's son, crave the fresh air of the ocean, and feel on shore that there is no freedom like that at sea. If thou hast war on hand in which we may take part, we pray thee tell us, and our swords and ships are ready!"

"Thou art a gentle and a noble boy," quoth Halfdan. "Full leave I give thee to sail anywhere; and for thy land at Tredalund, I tell thee I will look to it. Yarl Yalmar will look after all thy ships; thy jovial cousin, too, will want some looking after. Leave him to me. Brenda had better back to bower with the Lady Freydisa. I would not trust her to the mercy of yon loon, Thorkell. What makes the lubber?"

"I have not seen him since we came ashore, and thought it likely thou hadst sent for him, and looked,

indeed, to find him here. Brenda shall join the Lady Freydisa, and I must owe thee thanks for thinking of her need."

So in a very short space all was settled, and the lads, of whom the stirring events of their time had made men prematurely, gave orders for "Ellida" to spread her dragon wings to the breeze, and dance home over the summer wavelets that joyed to bear so brave a freight, and frolicked round the keel with a rippling laugh of happiness !

"Is there any delight at all to compare with that of steering a proud ship through the paths of the trackless ocean? It is something to govern the war-horse when the air is thick with arrows of the foe, and they fall around like snow flakes in the winter; but even that is not so wild a delight as this! Eh, Orm?"

"Don't bother! How many shields hadst thou cleft in twain from thy hand in England?"

"Only three; and but for thy timely aid, brother, I should not have been steering 'Ellida' to-night. Ha! Orm; this is just such a night as that on which Frithioff sailed to meet Ingeborg in Baldur's bower in *his* "Ellida." Thou knowest the lines :

"The stars above us gleam like lances,
 Flashing their welcome to the brave,
"Ellida" lightly homeward dances
 Buoyantly o'er the bounding wave!"

He sang this out in a loud, clear, ringing voice, and the verse was taken up by the jocund warriors, who were not, as somebody writes of the Northmen, "*half* sailors and *half* soldiers," but *whole* sailors and *whole* soldiers; as happy on one element as on the other, and daring death with unconcern on both! It was a

pleasant sound to hear those voices, so recently raised in battle-shouts of rage, now attuned to such a gentle measure! The breeze was light, and the rowers ever and anon urged "Ellida" forward by the aid of their mighty oars, and then their songs rose in the air, and mingled with the strains chaunted by Ægir the sea-god's daughters.

So they came to Tredalund, and anchored "Ellida" with the rest of the fleet in the little bay. Then Hahkon and Orm sought Brenda, to tell her that the Lady Freydisa would receive her in her bower while the vikings were away.

The old woman was sitting with her maidens in the bower at Tredalund, and telling them tales from the ancient saga lore of her race in which she was so rich; but she heard the well-known tread of her warrior boys, and she, with all her maidens, rose to greet the young lord of Tredalund and his foster-brother.

The young men marched up to the mother, whose counsel and training had done so much to make them what they had become, and saluted her with a respect mixed with affection that is rarely found in the world now-a-days.

Horns of wine appeared as if by magic, and the youthful champions drank healths to the vala and her tribe of golden-haired maidens who surrounded her. They spoke of their adventures in England, and how they intended making a viking voyage to the sunny south, and that during their absence King Halfdan and the Lady Freydisa had offered to take charge of her at Framness.

Then Brenda told her sons that she had matters of serious import to confide before she could leave Tredalund; and she took them into a distant room

called the treasure-house, to which she and the steward alone had access.

When arrived, she bade the boys be seated, and then began nearly in these words :

“ Children, beware ! There is a snake in the grass. It is good that ye sail ; perhaps it would have been better had ye stayed ! Ride not unarmed, ride not alone ; trust none whose sword has not been proved to be better than his tongue. If ye leave, leave quickly ; if ye stay, be firm ! Do nothing without the Ting’s-men. Debate your lot with them. Watch those near, for there is concealed danger at hand. Enough ; I must go and sleep. Good-night. Tyr watch over you, Odin guide you, and Thor give you nerve. Good-night.”

She rose and left them. At that time it would have been considered an unworthy deed to ask her to explain these rather mysterious hints, for she stood in a relationship to the boys which commanded almost awful respect. So they rose and led her back to the bower in silence, wondering what this might mean.

The hall was thronged with warriors at the evening meal, and Thorkell too was present on the dais. He spoke little, and seemed not too well pleased to see his cousin take his place in hall.

The night came on as usual. The warriors lay them down to sleep in their mantles ; Hahkon and Orm sought the chamber in which the late yarl used to sleep, between the hall and bower.

Soon they fell asleep and all was hushed around ; nothing was to be heard save the tramp of the sentinels on guard, and even this sound was inaudible to Hahkon, whose slumbers were those of the pure-minded and just, calm and profound. Suddenly he

was awakened by a stealthy step falling within the chamber. He started up and just perceived a skulking form slinking off to the door-way. Quick as thought, he was up and his hand had seized something in its grasp. There was a struggle, in which Hahkon felt a sharp stab in his side, and in the sudden shock of this the midnight visitor was gone.

Awakened by the scuffle, Orm started hot in chase, but could find nothing in the hall to show a trace of such a visitor. The champion at the door on watch declared no soul had passed. The warriors in hall were sleeping like the dead; Thorkell was snoring loudly close to the dais. Nothing was there to give the slightest clue as to the wretch who tried the nithing trick of murder on a sleeper.

The morning came, the leech was shown the wound, which he declared was nothing; though, had the blow been struck by strong and warlike hands, it must have finished Hahkon. As it was, he seemed uninjured and very fresh and well.

Much talk ensued amongst the champions, who were amazed that such a nithing deed could be attempted there. Then Hahkon and his brother rode forth to view the land.

All round the coasts of Scandinavia the ground more or less was occupied. Dwellings were there, and corn was raised, and hops to make the mead. But farther in the inner districts large forests held their own. The Scandinavians rather ploughed the waves than the fair earth, and so they lived as near as they could to the waves they courted. Hahkon and Orm rode inland without a groom or page. They fain would see the timber they needed for more ships, for Hahkon meant to visit the English coast once more,

and wreak still further vengeance upon the English churls by whom his father fell.

So they rode gently on together towards a mighty wood, rich in such splendid timber as nowhere else is found.

Just as they skirted this dense wood an arrow pierced Orm's cap, striking the blood-red comb. Instantly Hahkon dashed into the forest, followed by Orm. They saw a startled figure flitting amongst the trees. A moment, and no more. It vanished from their ken. Still on they rode in the direction in which the form had fled. It was a tangled path the horses trod, uncertain of their footing because the trunks of trees and the low brushwood and the creeping shrubs made snares to catch their feet. Hahkon reined in his horse to try to see beyond where the trees grew less thickly, a little to the left. Then Orm passed on in front, crying : "Yonder the nithings lurk ! Foul rascals ! We shall have them, Hahkon. Follow me ! "

Thus saying, he sprang forwards, when suddenly he stopped, hearing a voice exclaim :

"Help, Orm ! It's over with me now ; I'm slain ! "

He rushed up to his foster-brother's side as he fell heavily to the ground. "Hahkon !" he cried, "look up !" But there was no reply. Orm sprang off from the saddle, having caught the other horse and bound the two together to one of the smaller trees. Between the stems of the tall pines he saw two figures flitting through the wood. He felt how useless it would be to follow, and leave his comrade there. So he drew forth his horn and blew a signal blast, and then proceeded to examine Hahkon's wounds.

The villains twice had stabbed him in that short

space of time, and he was bleeding freely from a deep gash in the side.

Orm doffed his own blue tunic, and then took off his shirt, which he tore up in strips to bandage up the wounds. This done, he blew another note, and still no answer came.

Hours seemed flying by, and still no succour came ; at last, two horsemen rode as though they had left the wood and were in act to ride on to the hall, whence Orm and Hahkon came. Again Orm blew his horn, and the two riders stopped, and turning to the sound, rode up to where he stood.

"Whoever you may be," said Orm, "help me to raise my friend. He has been foully slain ! The elder of the two new comers went to where Hahkon lay, and took his hand in his. "Oh ! he is living still," he cried. "He takes more killing than a scratch like that ! "

"Help me to mount him and to lead his horse back to the hall down yonder."

The stranger seemed to hesitate ; but the younger man who had not spoken yet, exclaimed :

"Yes, there are more coming ; help him to his horse." He alighted and came forward, and then Orm knew it was Thorkell ; while the older man was he who had been with him at the Ting on Attle's grave !

CHAPTER X.

HOW HAKHON AND ORM WENT ON THE
VIKING PATH.

THE summer passed away, and the winter came before Hahkon was sufficiently himself to bear arms. Thanks to the incessant care of his foster-mother Brenda, aided by the maidens and matrons of the train, he was well enough by Yule (our Christmas) to take his seat on the high bank and drink mead.

A grand time was Yule to the Scandinavians ; and even Christianity has been unable to drive it out, although the period formerly known by the twelfth name of Odin, Yoleg, Yolk, or Yulg (softened into Yule) has assumed a holier name, the festival remains as pagan as ever. The holly, the mistletoe, the very pudding and the feast, are all as stoutly pagan as ever they were.

So healths were drunk, and songs were sung of Odin and the gods ; and Hahkon, joyed to see his people gay. The skalds told the tales of the deeds of Attlé's race, and included the achievements of the present Yarl with his friend and foster-brother, "Orm of the iron hand." And after Yule, King Halfdan came to visit Hahkon, and they were very merry. But the king was less kind than usual when he saw for the first time the face of Yarl Thorkell in the hall on the daïs.

"Have a care, Hahkon," he said to him one day. "That fellow's face bodes no good, and methinks we

have been unwise in giving him so much power in thy absence, and such an interest in thy death. If—but never mind, I will not make thy young heart suspicious. Time will show. What says Brenda about thy loving cousin ? ”

“ I know not how to answer thee ! She, who is so good, so kind to all the world, is more against poor Thorkell than even thou.”

“ Then, by the belt of Baldur ! she has scant love for him, I trow. I shall have that fellow over to Framness, and set a watch upon him. He is not safe, Hahkon ! Hast thou never noticed ? He plays with his dagger, never wears a sword except when quite obliged. He cannot row, the lubber ! and hates the deep blue sea ! The nithing ! ”

“ Nay, King Halfdan, he is not so bad. True, he is moody, and loves silent walks ; seems always thinking, never sings. That strikes me as passing strange. But he is not so bad as thou and Brenda think, of that I feel assured.”

“ Thou art open and free, bold in the battle and hearty in hall. Odin and Thor thou knowest full well ; but the false arts of the mischief maker, the defamer of the gods, Loki, are foreign to thee ! Still we must be wise as well as brave. We must practise our judgment, or all will go wrong.”

After much pleasant converse the king departed with his train, and again Tredalund was left to its own resources. But as the spring came on there was plenty of life on the shores of the little bay ; and when the green and blue of field and flood took the place of the black and white of winter, there were greater rejoicings than ever, for two new dragons had been added to Hahkon’s fleet, and these were to be

commanded by Hahkon and Orm respectively. Other warriors had decided for the viking path, and the command of the fleet was Hahkon's by invitation of the whole train.

On board of "Ellida" there was great excitement, as it was a point of honour that the ship bearing the commander-in-chief should be the first under weigh, and the old Scandinavian refrain, even now heard on board English ships, resounded as the men tugged with might and main at the capstern, or rather windlass.

"Eostra* has opened the eastern door,
Heave ho, my hearties !
Baldur the beautiful beams once more
On the ships and sailors, the sea and shore,
With a heave ho, stamp, and go !
Heave ho, my hearties !

"Heave up the anchor, heave away still,
Heave ho, my hearties !
Pull the bow oar till she bears off to fill
Her snowy white sail, then weigh with a will,
With a heave ho, stamp, and go !
Heave ho, my hearties !

"Thundering Thor was a sailor true,
Heave ho, my hearties !
Odin the wise was an oarsman too,
They sailed their ships, and the giants they slew,
With a heave ho, stamp, and go !
Heave ho, my hearties !

"Heave ho ! for Hahkon the brave,
Heave ho, my hearties !
Heave ho ! for the warrior's wave,
Heave ho ! for a champion's grave,
With a heave ho, stamp, and go !
Heave ho, my hearties !"

* The goddess of Spring (English, Easter).

In a solemn Ting it had been resolved that the fleet should bear down on the shores of the Mediterranean, still rich in the wonders of the past, and then that the dragons, disguised as merchant ships, should present themselves at various ports, where the warriors were to appear in the guise of simple merchants, trading in curiosities. Having made these dispositions in so laudable a manner, the plan was next to reassemble and appear in arms, retake the objects sold, and add to the booty any others that might appear suitable to the tastes and requirements of the north.

And now we have the reason which impelled these men to leave their home and fatherland for a wild adventurous life on the sea. That fatherland being unable to yield the harvest that could be obtained in more favoured regions, they saw themselves referred to a more congenial element, which they, by a curious train of reasoning (not quite extinct amongst us, the descendants of a kindred folk), considered as their peculiar property, over which they had a *right*, entitling them to everything swimming or floating on the surface of the ocean.

And this very soon extended to the coasts, whence, by a slight stretch of an elastic sort of conscience, the passage to inland towns and possessions was easy.

Who does not know the Mediterranean ? It matters little that you have not sailed on its deep blue waters in the body. You must have read or heard enough about it to feel its power over the mind, though absent from it in the flesh.

Hahkon was steering his dragon, and gazing with delight at the outline of the shore as he passed spots

made familiar to the world in all time by the glorious old poets and historians of the classic ages. Little knew Hahkon, and less would he have cared, for the legends and myths of the south. They would never have suited his temperament, as the grand old sagas and sacred hymns of his own race suited him. Jupiter was unknown to him, and had he heard of the actions of that most unscrupulous deity, he would have despised him as heartily as he did a Roman! Had he not his own warrior god Thor?

He was standing at the raised part of the stern, from which he could survey the whole of the deck before him, as well as the scenery of the Italian coast, which impressed him rather differently than might have been expected.

"There is a lovely coast!" he said to Svend Svendson, who was his second in command as far as that vessel was concerned. "Was ever coast better fitted for sea-kings? I trow not, and yet these puny southerners are shy of the very waves that call them to come and dance! They say that the people formerly inhabiting these shores were stalwart warriors, and ruled the world until they sought to make the Northmen slaves!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Svend. "A likely tale, indeed! make slaves of Northmen. Much they gained by that, I trow!"

"Well, they gained loss of all those outer parts of what they called the Empire, which our brave sires could seize. The Danes and Goths and English formed a band to free the world from slavery, and Rome, the tyrant, fell."

"Yes, I have heard the tale from old blind Knut

the skald. He used to say, if I remember right, that the Welsh [foreigners] were frightened at the eagle's wings which all the warriors of Odin wear, and wore in those old days. I often laugh to think of the trained soldiers flying like children from a thing like this!"

And here he pointed to his iron-bound helm, with the broad eagle's wings spreading on each side from it.

"My foster-mother is a vala," Hahkon replied, "and she knows many sagas of the days of old. She told me one thing I can scarce believe, how, when these conquerors, these great ones of the earth, heard the sword struck upon the sounding shield, which showed the pleasure Northmen had in war, they ran away! actually ran away!"

"I well believe it, if the other tale be true; and in a sort it seems to prove it true, for if the nithings let fear enter through the eye, why should they keep the ear closed up against it?"

"It is well argued, Svend; and now on yonder shore stands the great city, this old tyrant Rome. Men say it is a wonder for hoards of hidden wealth. The nithings! they shall share with us, or not a stone remains even of their ruins to tell where Rome had been!"

It can be a matter of little surprise to modern Englishmen to hear that the Scandinavians of a thousand years ago had very vague ideas about the race that dwelt beside the Tiber. The town of Luna, which was then standing, was thought by Hahkon to be Rome itself. When he came a little nearer land and saw the smiling vineyards round the town, the stately suburbs and the town itself, he ordered,

by a signal, all the ships to anchor, and that a grand service of thanksgiving should be held to Thor *for giving such a rich possession to his sons!* Remember! he had but seen it yet from his ship's deck some mile or two at sea. But he felt sure that Thor had given him the town already.

So the sail was lowered, and a boat despatched to Orm's good dragon, "Fenrir," begging that warrior to come to Hahkon's ship, a summons he was not too long in heeding. And when he came on board, the pleasure the two brothers felt in seeing one another is not to be described. They had never been kept so long apart before.

We shall not force ourselves upon this solemn scene. Such love is far too sacred; besides, not much was *said*. At last the young commander took the word. "Orm," he began, "I did not send for thee to make a fool of either thee or me. Thou seest yonder town? Well, it is Rome. What thinkest thou? To me it seems our force will never take it! See what walls! we can do nothing with them, we have no engines. No, not a catapult to give the nithing Romans just a taste of northern war!"

"No!" replied Orm. "I thought Rome had been a ruin, with many places full of buried wealth. But yonder is a fortress! The nithings love stone walls and shirk all open fighting!"

"They have assumed the Christian faith, which suits their peaceful natures almost as well as the fat idle churls in England! It is a creed of peace! They have no war god, only a sort of Baldur, whom they christen Christ, a god of peace and love! Fancy a god of peace! How can a warrior worship such, I wonder? And yet I do remember certain things they

told me when in England, which seem right noble lore. They often come across me!"

"Dost thou, indeed, remember aught of the wild stories?"

"A little; sometimes more and sometimes less. In truth, I never can forget them."

"Yarl Hagmar says that all the English now are Christians, and that the old faith of Odin is dead in the land. The Franks are Christians, as the Romans are."

"Then will the work be lighter for the viking's sword! I have no doubt that it is Odin's will to let the curs first fall away from him, that our good blades may do his work."

"It must be so; for the whole of midgard [earth] is his, and he will give it to his sons. We shall cover the whole earth as long as we wield the sword. But when we forsake our arms for the vile plough and viler spade, we fall like yon foul English churls. No! Hahkon. I am still a son of Odin, and, with his help, in the old faith will die."

"I believe more in my own right hand than in any particular love that Odin bears to me. However, I do nothing to displease him; and though the words I heard the English churchmen use *do* ring in my ears, I am a 'champion of Odin.'"

By this time other leaders of the other ships had come on board to Hahkon, who announced to them that being in sight of "Rome" (for so he still called Luna), it was needful they should agree upon their plan of attack.

Then spake Yarl Hagmar, a burly chief, of very noble strain and high achievements:

"Yarl Hahkon, fear is the great conqueror. It is a

nithing guest in a man's heart, for it lets in the enemy, and defeats him who receives it. Now we who know not this same coward fear are always victors. Our enemies know fear, and they will fall before our swords. Fear is our best ally! I would propose that thou shouldst take thy dreaded father's name. If that be done, our foes are quelled already."

The audience addressed by Hahkon consisted of the chiefs commanding each ship. We should call them captains now, and they served Hahkon partly for their land, and partly because his fame was growing in the north, and men were certain that under him there would be active employment, and the safe alternative of fame on earth or immediate passage to Valhalla. The suggestion that Hahkon should take the "Sea-Wolf's" name was therefore received by some two hundred and odd tried warriors, whose opinion on such matters was valuable in the highest degree, and a debate seemed likely to ensue on the delicate point as to whether a man might assume his father's name for the purpose of securing a victory by the terror it might inspire. There was no applause; murmurs passed round the Ting, and some of the champions showed rather more impatience than would now be thought advisable to manifest on such occasions.

But Hahkon, seeing the storm brewing, raised his hand to command silence, and then addressed his chiefs:

"Champions of Odin! ill does it beseem me, so young a warrior, to pretend to teach those who are renowned for wisdom as much as for bravery, men who, like their own good sword blades, are keen as well as firm, bright as well as ready for stout blows.

I appeal to you, therefore, to help me and advise me, if I am wrong, which can hardly be the case. I am advised to take my father's name, and assume his glory, to terrify these Roman Christian slaves. I answer that, as a son of Odin, I refuse to do so, on the ground of the law in the *Havemál*, which says :

“ ‘Boast not thy father’s glory as thine not known.
For when thou canst not bend a bow, ’tis not thine own.
What wilt thou with the honour, in the cold grave lying?
Streams force their way through ocean with their own strength
flying.’ ”

Here the assembled chiefs standing round the bulwarks clashed their applause on their shields with their ringing blades, and the waves, called by the skalds the daughters of Ægir the sea-god, danced to the music.

“ Then,” quoth Hahkon, “ I am right glad that ye approve what I have said. I should never take another man’s name, although any other stratagem is fair in war. I would fain know whether yonder stone walls are proof against our battle axes? If so, we must take the town by wily tricks, which leave to me. I have to tell you now that, not wishing to disturb the peace of the grave, by taking my father’s name of honour, I shall, if successful in this war, take on me the name of the ‘ Sea-Eagle,’ which shall be a strong stream in the ocean of brave men forcing its way by its own strength, and not by any favour!”

This mode of looking at the question settled it for ever, and when the Ting was closed all the chiefs came and shook hands with Hahkon, in token of their concurrence in all he had said, their thorough agreement with his principles, and determination to adhere to their oath of fealty, and to stand by their young leader to the last.

Mead was served round, and the chieftains drank deep draughts to the young Sea-Eagle, though the name was not nearly so effective as the "Sea-Wolf," which, to their minds, *meant business*.

According to Hahkon's plan, the ships gradually approached nearer and nearer to the shore, until they formed a sort of half-moon, the two extremities of which touched the two headlands of the narrow bay, from the shape of which some people presume that the name of Luna (the moon) was applied to the town. The ships were now lashed head and stern, so as to form one unbroken curved line effectually barring all exit from the port. The two end ships were moored by chains to the rocks on shore, while the other ships, besides the lashings which bound each one to the vessel before and the vessel abaft her, were anchored. The shields of the port side of the ship (then called the *back*) were removed.

When these dispositions had been made the attack was commenced by each ship sending a boat on shore containing from five to ten men, armed with bows and arrows, spears, javelins, battle-axes, and the grand war-blade of the Scandinavians. Those who carried swords and battle-axes were furnished with shields, and marched in front; while those with bows and arrows, javelins and spears marched behind, under cover of the shields of their comrades.

The formation was the "wedge," being an isosceles triangle with the apex towards the enemy. This apex was, on the present occasion, occupied by Hahkon, who, as soon as everything was ready, put his signal horn to his lips and gave the order to advance, and commenced singing Halfdan's war-song, with fresh lines improvised for the occasion.

WAR SONG.

Strike with the sword ; strew the pathway to Odin,
 With slaughter we gladden the gods in their halls !
 Forward, ye chosen ones, champions of Halfdan,
 War to the Welshmen, and down with their walls !

Slay with the sword, send the warrior to Odin !
 The craven to Hela in misery falls ;
 But our hope is on high who are champions to Halfdan,
 When we war with the Welshmen and level their walls !

Smite with the sword, reap the harvest for Odin !
 Each valkyr * above us to Valhalla calls ;
 And we'll drink there the brown mead as champions of Halfdan,
 Who warred with the Welshman, and cast down his walls.

Red is the flag, black the raven of Odin,
 'Tis a hue that all Romans and Christians appals !
 Cut the curs down, chosen champions of Halfdan,
 Woe to the Welshmen who war within walls !

Halfway between the town of Luna and the beach
 the army prepared a sort of camp. Of course there
 were no tents ; but holes were made in the earth for
 their fires by the cooks ; bandages were prepared for
 the wounded by the women of the fleet, who had been
 disembarked for the purposes of tending those
 who might require nursing, of animating the fresh
 combatant with their voices singing the warlike
 hymns of their creed, of nerving the arm of the
 champion, who felt that the eye of woman was upon
 him ; and, if truth must be told, not only of re-
 proaching bitterly those who turned back in fight,
 but actually despatching them with the curved
 knives which they bore in their girdles.

* Female attendants on Odin, who were despatched by him to every battle field
 to choose the best warriors slain in the fight, and bear them to Valhalla.

So temple, camp, hospital, and kitchen were all prepared on the bare ground, with heaven's blue vault for a roof, and woman as priestess, prophetess, and leech.

Then the fighting men marched on, and when they were near enough to the city gate, a champion stepped forward from the wedge, and advancing, blew his horn with a loud sonorous blast. He then approached close to the towers that flanked the gate on either hand ; and finding the postern closed and the gate itself strongly barred, he cried out with a loud voice :

"I summon you, citizens of Rome, to open your gates to Hahkon the yarl, son of Attlé the Sea-Wolf. He demands to enter in peace ; but if denied, he swears to sound his war note and put you to the sword. Quarter we neither give nor take. Mercy we do not know !"

Then there appeared a venerable man on the wall, and he, looking from the battlements, exclaimed in Frankish :

"We do not understand your words ; but there is an Englishman with us who shall come and hold parley with you to know wherefore ye assail us."

The Norseman understood little of this ; but he caught the word "Englishman," and "come," and he thought this a reflection on Yarl Hahkon, on account of his having been in England. *Come* he took to be a defiance ; and so, taking one of the javelins with which he was armed, he flung it at the gate, in token that war had commenced. The missile entered deep into the wood-work of the barrier, and quivered a moment from the force with

which it was flung. The second javelin had a more deadly mission, for it struck the old man who had spoken from the walls, and pierced him to the heart. What mattered it to Hagbert whether the man were priest or warrior? How should he know it was a priest? The full canonicals of white and gold and red seemed to the Norseman a gay warlike dress. And so he hurled him down!

But as the good old bishop fell, a storm of arrows whizzed against the Dane. Some he caught promptly on his trusty shield, some grazed his eagle plumes, others he caught deftly with his sword, cutting the iron heads off with the blade. By some miracle, whether of chance or of skill (but, anyhow, a miracle), he escaped, and retreated to the pagan host, never turning his back on his foes, but facing them until he reached Hahkon, who was standing with his hands resting on the handle of his fearful battle-axe, the head of which rested on the ground. Hahkon was laughing merrily, with a boy's delight, as the Northman avoided the countless shafts sent against him; and as he reached the wedge he said: "I owe thee another shield, my friend! We shall find plenty within, and thou shalt have thy choice. I like thy sword play very well. It savours of much practice. March!"

And the wedge moved on to the attack.

When they were within bow-shot they were received with such a shower of arrows as made Hahkon say, as the children still say in parts of Scandinavia and Germany, when it snows: "Mother Hela is making her bed."

The archers from the centre of the wedge shot

forth an answering shower of arrows, so directed as to rise nearly perpendicularly into the air, and then turning, fall point downwards just within the battlements. All this time the warriors forming the sides of the wedge did their best to parry the shots with their shields and swords.

By this time they had come close up to the walls, and here the warriors performed a very daring feat. One of them stooped down at the foot of the tower, another climbed on his back, a third on his shoulders, and a fourth on his, and so on, until a sort of living ladder was formed. The uppermost warrior sprang on to the battlements with his mighty axe, which had been passed up to him from below, being handed from warrior to warrior, and when inside, armed with this fearful weapon, he made dreadful havoc amongst the defenders!

But Hahkon found this too expensive in warrior life, and not worth his loss in men, for none of those who climbed the battlements lived to descend and open the gate to his comrades below. The archers posted in the eyelet holes of the flanking towers shot down the daring champions forming the scaling ladder, so as to render it almost useless, and, after an assault of nearly three hours' duration, only seven had succeeded in reaching the battlements, but none had lived to descend to the gate within. Forty had been slain by the archers. It was the same with those who had attacked the gate with their axes, where two men with shields were posted to protect each one who applied the weapon. The defenders were prepared for these, and poured down molten lead and boiling oil upon them, through the apertures under the battlements, while through the embrasures huge

stones were rolled, which, falling on the attacking force, crushed them at their work.

Foiled, but not daunted, Hahkon now withdrew, retiring his men in order from the assault. No pleasant greeting awaited them when they reached the camp. In fact, so violently were they assailed by the reserve of women who had waited there, that Hahkon threatened to tie the women's hands behind them, and row them to the ships, if they but spoke again.

"I wonder much that ye, whose duty is to cheer the men, and lead them on to glory, should try to frighten them from making fresh assaults. They fear your snarling tongues more than the Roman spears! By Frigga! If once more I hear ye howl I'll send you back on board, tied hand and foot. I will, upon my bracelet! I shall take yon town, and give my men the spoil; but hear me, wenches, not a stick for you! Ye shall not have an ounce of silver for a brooch, because, instead of cheering us, ye damp our hearts with howling. Thou, sir priest, be silent. They are women, and may not have other punishment than to be sent back chained. But a word from thee, I'll deal with thee as never priest was dealt with yet. Knowest thou I have been baptized a Christian? And if thou give me cause for fresh displeasure, by all the gods and goddesses, I swear I'll prove myself a Christian, and, by Thor, I'll hang you all!"

It is quite impossible to give a modern reader any idea of the effect of this speech. It was no idle threat, and the notion of Hahkon's turning Christian in earnest seemed far from improbable. The priest looked dignified, and stalked away. The women looked defiant, but they held their tongues. The warriors,

half scared at such an act as bearding priests and flouting priestesses, were yet well pleased with Hahkon, who had shown them how a leader's behest should be obeyed in war, without a thought beyond it.

Having gained this point, and silenced priest and priestess, Hahkon walked aside with Orm.

"That sudden thought of turning Christian has given me another. Quick! get me a coffin made by any of our men who know enough of wood-work. Let the priests have white robes and other garments ready. And see there be left room enough within the narrow box to hold my battle-axe and sword. You, Hagbert, Svend, Thorgils, Yarl Brand, and Oloff Skull, must march with me as priests of Odin."

"Thou art our leader; we must do thy will. The mad are loved by Frigga!"

"I am not mad, good brother. I promise thee the rarest sport that ever viking witnessed. Now, be quick, and call these men together for a council. Say nothing of my madness. Leave the rest to me. Send me the wood-wrights, quick."

Greatly perplexed, Orm hurried to the yarls and other leaders, just as Hahkon bade. The resolution and the pluck displayed by this young viking in quelling the women's tongues had hugely pleased the champions. His youth permitted him to speak to these fair scourges of the brave as not a man in all that armed host had dared to do. They loved him for the deed, and felt like naughty schoolboys whose punishment has been remitted through some interceding friend.

We shall not tire the reader by giving the debate. It was no public Ting, but rather council, called for special work connected with the progress of the war.

It was a stormy meeting ; but at last Hahkon's commands were seen to be the best that could have well been issued at the time, and so his plan was acted on at once.

And first a goodly coffin was contrived, like those employed by Christians. It was wide, and well could hold Yarl Hahkon and his axe.

Then Hahkon called the women of the camp, and laid his commands upon them. His wish was understood, and all the priestesses and valas and the rest promised him blind obedience.

Then he called the priests before him, and brought them to his will with very little trouble.

Late that night a horrid cry of women in despair burst from the camp. Shriek upon shriek arose, and terrified the citizens of Luna, who thronged the walls and listened to the din. The cries continued all the night ; and when the morning dawned the watchmen on the towers were surprised to see a train of women dressed in white, with hair dishevelled, and with dreadful cries, approach the city gate. A handsome matron, older than the rest, stepped from among the train, and cried out with a piercing voice, using the Frankish tongue : "If ye be Christians, grant us help at need. Let some one come to us who speaks our tongue !" A priest, who knew the Frankish speech, appeared and asked her, "what she craved ?"

"Our yarl is dying. Hahkon the Sea-Eagle has been struck by your unerring arrows. We had thought he would recover; but no ! his life is sped. The brave young yarl is dying !"

"How can that be otherwise for us than tidings of relief and happiness ? How can we help thy pagan lord ?"

"He is no pagan, good sir priest. He was baptized a Christian two years back in England. We knew no word of this. But now he craves the rites which Christians use, before departing to the world of bliss, and we entreat you send a holy man to aid Yarl Hahkon in his dying hour. The noblest of our yarls shall stay a hostage here, and if a hair be injured of the holy man, slay ye the hostage. Tell us yea or nay!"

"Daughter, I cannot answer of myself; but I will ask the magistrates and generals of Luna what to do, and straight return to you."

Long did it seem to those fair northern maids before the priest returned. And when he did, their joy surpassed all bounds when he informed them that the lords of Luna, in pity for the state of the young Christian yarl, would grant this strange request. "I," said the priest, "myself, will come with you, and hear the dying man's confession; I and some other priests. We shall be there anon."

And in a very short space of time the good priest, in his canonicals, with others of the cloth, with all the sacred signs and symbols of the Church, came through the opened gate. They joined the band of pagan priestesses, and marched together to the Norseman's camp.

Here they found Hahkon stretched upon the ground, apparently in very urgent need. The matron, who spoke Frankish, told the Christian priest that Hahkon seemed much fainter, but had wished to die a member of the Christian Church; and he had begged, as his last dying wish, to be interred in Rome's cathedral church. Then she said:

"The yarl is very wealthy; and he said that, if

this wish were granted, he would give you for the use of your high altar ten thousand marks of gold." The priest looked startled at the mighty sum. "Besides," she added, in a sadder tone, "after his death he leaves you, to be spent in masses for his soul, twenty-five marks of pure unsullied gold!"

The monks seemed awe-struck at these mighty sums, when he, who spoke in Frankish, had explained the promises thus made. In haste they did for Hahkon all those things which holy Church ordains, and left the yarl, bearing with them a right noble gift given to the priest by Orm.

Then they returned to Luna, and told the magistrates what Yarl Hahkon wished, showed what a mighty gift they had received from him, and how he soon must die.

Then the lords and magistrates and priests resolved that it would be a wicked thing to let a Christian perish body and soul, when they could do so much to save him. With delight the promise was confirmed, that when he died, his body should be brought to the high church of Luna, and laid in pomp to rest. A grave was dug before the high altar, and all things were made ready to grace his sepulchre. One stipulation only did they make, and that was that the men who came to bring the body should not be armed knights, but priests and holy men, who were to come unarmed, clad in their long white robes.

This stipulation just fell in with Hahkon's plan, and when the messenger (a priestess) brought the news to camp, he took off his gold bracelet, a very princely present, to give her in reward. But she flung the gift to earth, saying: "Thou hast threatened us with shameful treatment, Yarl! Thy bidding we shall

do, because thou art our leader, and it is Odin's will that we obey thee. But gifts we take not from the hand that chides."

"I like thy spirit, priestess, but I will be obeyed. As leader of the host I order thee to wear it, or dread Odin's high displeasure. Withdraw without a word! Time presses."

Seeing it would be useless to pursue her point, the priestess now withdrew with her present, leaving Hahkon, Orm, and the rest to prepare for the conclusion of the farce, which they intended to convert into a terrible tragedy.

Then priests of Odin in long white robes and with whiter beards, with their small flint knives in their girdles, near to their flinty hearts, ran to the gate of Luna, and were admitted. One, the elder and most venerable of the train, demanded, in Frankish, speech with "his brethren of the Christian faith." And they were all led to a large space called the forum, in imitation of the imperial city. Here they announced the death of their leader, Yarl Hahkon Attléson the Sea-Eagle, who, having died in the Christian faith, left nothing but sorrow and wailing behind. Here a superior magistrate demanded of the priest, through the Frankish interpreter, what the pagan army intended to do when their yarl was interred. To this the priest replied :

"When our yarl is interred before the high altar in the presence of ourselves, and one or two of the chiefs who must bear witness to the burial, the whole army will return to our ships, after paying you the promised sums, and never shall we return to these waters."

"What security are we to have of your faith?"

"Any hostages ye please, priest or layman, and our oath as to the strict performance of this promise."

"Go back to the camp; bring one of your leaders as a hostage, and another to perform the oath!"

Then the priests retired, and on returning from the camp, soon reappeared with two stalwart champions brave in golden ornaments, decked with the fear-inspiring eagle's wings, and unarmed, save with sword and shield.

After much examination through the interpreters, each of these champions drew his sword, and thrusting its point into the earth, held his hand over the ball of the hilt; and the interpreters explained to the Italians that if one of them would descend to the spot and grasp the viking's hand over the sword-hilt, that would be the most solemn oath that a Northman could swear. Accordingly, the president or chief of the assembly left his place and grasped the warrior's hand, who immediately repeated, slowly and distinctly, so that the words could be translated into Frankish, and thence into Italian:

"I, Sigurd of Stromness, Yarl of Biornland, hereby swear that when the dead body of our leader, Yarl Hahkon, shall be interred by you in peace at the foot of your high altar, then the whole army of warriors now in his band shall leave these waters never to return; but if he be not buried by you, as you undertake, whatever excuse ye may have or seem to have for non-performance of your engagement, I am thereby free of my oath, and shall do my best to reduce your town to ashes. So may Thor and Odin help me in my need as I keep this vow; so may my good sword serve me or fail me as I keep my oath."

This oath seemed to give great satisfaction to the

citizens, more especially as the interpreter explained that the oath on the sword could never be broken.

Then up spake Biorn Bear-Tooth the yarl, and he declared in a loud and solemn voice that he would remain hostage until the coffin containing his leader, the young Yarl Hähkon should be brought into the church; at which time, if no sign of war had been given on either side he should be free of his oath. But if any warlike act were done by the sons of Odin against the sons of Rome before the coffin should be brought into the church, then the Romans might slay him (Biorn) without hesitation. On the other hand, if violence were offered to him before the entrance of the coffin into the church, then he should be bitterly avenged by all the champions of the host. He claimed, further, to be liberated the moment the coffin crossed the threshold of the church, and to be present at the interment if he wished.

This oath was taken on the sword, as in the case of Sigurd of Biornland, who offered to remain with his friend Biorn Bear-tooth, until the arrival of the funeral procession. Thus, on the Italians agreeing to this proposal, two stalwart champions were secured on the pagan side, ready to assist, in case of need, with their powerful swords.

All these preliminaries being arranged, the priests of Odin were allowed to depart, and two hours later a long train of men in white robes was seen advancing from the camp. Six of these bore on their shoulders, on three spear shafts, the coffin of Hahkon the Yarl. In front of the train marched a skald or harper, who sang of the deeds of the encoffined viking in the true Northern strain. Six more, clad as priests, moved after the coffin, to relieve the bearers when they felt

fatigued. Another six followed, singing the chorus to the “*drapa*” or dirge of the skald.

The chief magistrate of Luna, attended by a numerous train of followers, caused the gate to be opened. The street leading to the cathedral was lined with armed men, who looked on in wonder at the proceedings, and were especially astonished at the haughty bearing of some of the priests of Odin.

The procession moved up the high street to the cathedral, on each side of the door of which the colossal figures of Sigurd and Biorn stood, like guardian giants, looking down upon the rite with good-humoured contempt. As soon as the coffin bearing Hahkon crossed the threshold of the cathedral, the two friends stalked together down the street towards the gate, which the gateward was about to close, but Sigurd made a very significant sign, by pointing to his sword, and Biorn drew forth his horn, and prepared to blow a warning note upon it. Then the gateward, irresolute, not knowing what to do, sent rapidly a messenger on horseback to the chief magistrate for orders, who sent instant word that the two yarls were free. But they pretended not to understand, and stood there in the gateway, preventing its being closed.

Meanwhile the strangest scene was being enacted in the church that ever had been witnessed in the history of war.

The church was full to overflowing. Hardly was there space enough for Hahkon’s train to move. The Archbishop, in his mitre, stood before the grave. The priests and choristers chanted the “*De profundis*.” All present stood entranced.

“Set the bier down!”



"HIS RIGHT HAND GRASPED THE AXE."—P. 203.

Why does the good archbishop pale, and shrink back as appalled? Why do the chants cease suddenly? Listen. No sooner had the coffin touched the ground than up sprang Hahkon, like the god of war descended from Valhalla. Glittering in mail he stood. His right hand grasped the axe. The priestly bearers flung away their robes, and twenty of the stoutest warriors of the North stood there with axe and helm. The helmets had been carried underneath the robes, and in a trice the warriors were armed.

We will say nothing of what followed. War is a fearful trade, and full of dreadful sights and very horrid sounds. But to tell how the good archbishop was struck down, how priests and peaceful citizens were butchered, is a task our pen refuses. Scarce had the vikings cut their dreadful way, and issued from the church, when at the gate the viking horn was blown. Instantly a troop of champions, mounted on fleet war-horses, and fully armed in mail, rushed like a whirlwind from the camp. Sigurd and Biorn fought as their namesakes fought in the brave days of old, nor could the gateward and his men succeed in all their efforts to secure the gate. The vikings held it open till Hahkon and his warriors, double axe in hand, cut their way down the high street. When they reached the gate, they turned and faced the city.

Sigurd and Biorn stood back to back in the gateway, which they held until Hahkon, Orm, and the rest approached, and then they held the whole town at bay, till the mounted vikings came. These were in due time succeeded by the rest. Over the sack of Luna we shall draw a veil.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW THORKELL AND GRIMM KEPT HOUSE AT
TREDALUND.

WHEN Hahkon departed with his fleet dragons, Thorkell remained, according to Attlé's will, to guard the land from danger and to see that work was done upon the fields and buildings. More to Thorkell's taste was such a post than leading men to war.

Grimm was the name of the old warrior who remained with Thorkell, the non-combatants, and the women. Generally this office was given to some tried and experienced champion, to whose well-known probity the safety and well-being of those dear ones could be confided as a sacred trust, and upon whose skill as a soldier the absent warriors could rely. Hahkon had no confidence whatever in Thorkell, but at the same time he felt no misgivings on the score of the tender beings left in his charge, for had not Halfdan promised to look after them and him?

We have seen how Grimm left Thorkell in the wood, and at first he did not intend to return to him, but grave considerations of interest weighed in his mind against the personal dislike, nay, disgust, with which he regarded that hopeful youth, and induced him to return to his aid, and to strive heart and hand in his cause.

It was a fine summer evening, and these two worthies were sitting on the shore listening to the

songs of the waves, which, to the younger of the two at least, awakened none of the emotions which we have seen called up by the same sounds in the breasts of Orm and Hahkon ; for at last he said to his companion,

“ I say, Grimm, what a fool Hahkon must be to find any music in this tedious splash ! Ægir, the sea-god’s daughters, forsooth ! More like Ægir’s foster-mother trying to send him to sleep with a hush, hooshe, hush ! Slippy-sloppy life on board ship, and to what end ? To get one’s head broken, I trow. No ; give me the firm land of Tredalund, and Hahkon may have all the waves of the ocean, all the ships in the North, and all the glory of Valhalla for me. I would never dispute it ! Let who will be a sea-king, I am a land-king, I ! ”

The old man’s lips seemed to frame themselves to utter the word “ nithing ; ” but he repressed his own feeling by an effort and said only : “ Thou art wise beyond thy years and station. And now that Brenda has left, methinks it were as well to determine on some plan of action. I am weary of this idle, do-nothing life ! ”

“ Thou art as bad as Hahkon,” said the lad. “ Wilt thou sail on the viking path, and go to England or Britain, or whatever the cut-throat hole be called ? Go, if thou wilt. Halfdan has need of blades. Thine is a little rusty ; not so new as it once was, but what of that ? There is metal in it, as they say. Wilt serve ? ”

It seemed more than the old man could do to control his temper, which the boy’s taunts chafed most bitterly. At last he said :

“ Tempt me not too sorely. Much I can bear, but

this is almost too much. I had as lief as not fling thee into the bay, and all thy taunts were ended!"

"Thou couldst not do it, Grimm. Where would thy daughter and thy grandchild be without the hope which I have given thy creditor that I shall pay thy debt when I obtain my own? Kill me, and thou and all thy family, the gentle Kartyan and the tender Heckla, would all be sold as slaves. Ha, ha! Me-thinks I see you all, a cheerful party working beneath the lash."

"Taunt me no longer, boy. Horror of thraldom on my side, knowledge of certain secrets in my life which thou hast somehow gained, must shield thee from my wrath, at least for a time. But have a care, I warn thee. Urge it not too far."

"Well, now the raving fit sets in, we shall not come to business," said the boy. "I did my best to serve thee while my brave cousin yet remained ashore; but, thou hast seen thyself, nor knives nor arrows harm him! What wouldst thou have me do?"

The old man rose and strode along the beach before he said a word; then he replied:

"Thou canst do nothing but grind down these churls and win their means of life. Then are they at thy mercy. Gold we want, and it is well to raise it for King Halfdan's wars. A very good pretence would be to spread the news abroad that Hahkon has been taken and his dragons sunk. He needs a ransom; and as he is their beloved chief, a very god (hero is not the word), a second Odin, Thor appeared on earth, or Baldur come from heaven as Hahkon Attléson, they would sell their flocks and herds and harvest to find the money to set him free. Then, should he fall, as I am sure he will, the gold is thine

as well as Tredalund; and for such advice, and aid to follow it, thou canst not fail in honour to reward me by paying off the debt that threatens us with slavery. Should Hahkon cheat our hopes and come back here alive..... He cannot live for ever; *we must try again.*"

It was now summer, the cornfields were just putting forth the promise of an abundant harvest, and the pure Scandinavian atmosphere lent fresh beauty to the broad open countenances of the children of the cottagers.

In all the various huts these two found love for Hahkon amongst young and old. They represented the troubles likely to occur through the young yarl's detention, and further that, news having come of his imprisonment, there would be need of larger sums to ransom him. But everywhere they found the cottagers eager and willing to give their last cow to purchase their young lord's liberty.

Thorkell and Grimm were not pleased with their reception in one respect, still they were glad to find a readiness amongst the peasantry *to pay.* They returned to the hall, where the feasting of the guests was carried on in great profusion. There were but few warriors, and these were the older champions, who were somewhat inclined to rest and mead, and whose fighting days, though not yet over, were much on the decline. The poorer inhabitants of the villages were for the most part engaged in agricultural labour, though some were only too glad to enjoy the hospitality of the hall. Again, amongst the revellers were sundry small landowners, who were present by right, and who preferred the hall in its present state of comparative peace to the more

turbulent time, when all the warriors were assembled, and formed a boisterous party under the "sooted roof."

To such as these Thorkell knew how to appeal in speeches praising the blessings of a time of peace, while Grimm endeavoured to gain over the more warlike by pictures of the wealth which might, *under proper administration*, be made to flow from all parts of the earth to Tredalund.

To aid the scheme no better means could have been devised than the unbounded hospitality affected by Thorkell, and yet the very nature of the lad rendered this plan almost a failure. For there was no heartiness in his mirth; there was an absence of mind quite out of keeping with boy-nature, and this preoccupation of manner went dead against him in the eyes of those simple Northmen.

Amongst those who were often present on the high bank was a certain landowner, not of noble strain, but of considerable wealth, who, on that account had been honoured by Thorkell with a seat on that daïs, where hitherto none but the intimate friends of the yarl, persons of exalted rank, and even the king, had sat. Flattered by this distinction, the worthy freeman spoke out rather plainly on a point of doubt, upon which it had not occurred to Thorkell to touch, religion.

"Tell me, Yarl," said this staunch servant of the olden creed; "tell me, is it true that Hahkon the yarl became a Christian when he first went to England?"

"I have heard as much," said Thorkell, "though he never told me aught of his belief. I only know that he was moody and savage when men spoke of Christianity, and it was long before he became as he was wont to be before this thing was spoken of."

"Thou art not very much in error," said Yarl Grimm. "I know for certain he has been baptized."

This speech was heard by all present, producing, perhaps, a stronger feeling against Hahkon than had hitherto been raised by any of the covert attacks upon him made by these nithings.

The following morning Grimm proposed a ride to the "Stormy Ness," where the sorceress Fulda lived, in a strange weird dwelling, half house half cavern, partly built against the rock and partly excavated in its side.

Thorkell had a secret dread of Fulda, and did not relish the suggestion; but Grimm soon overcame his scruples and his fears, by showing how this woman ruled the opinions of the peasantry around. They went into the stables to find their horses, but the groom had turned them out to grass.

"Give me my cousin's horse, Ganger," cried Thorkell. "He is eating off his head in idleness. I never rode the beast."

"I would not go too near him, if I were in thy place. He is a clever fellow, and knows his master's friends and foes!"

"Silence! and do my bidding."

Reluctantly the groom obeyed, and the horse was soon saddled and bridled.

When all was ready, Thorkell sprang into the saddle, and the creature seemed to submit to his will; but as he rode off, accompanied by Grimm, the groom exclaimed:

"I never thought the 'lubber yarl' could have ridden like a warrior. Must be in the blood, I suppose; but if Ganger doesn't punish him when he gets a chance, my name is not Broms, that's all."

Ganger, however, carried Thorkell like an ordinary cob, showing no desire to play tricks, and at last landed him in perfect safety at the door of the "spákonna," or prophetess, whose dwelling, on the dizzy height of the "Stormy Ness," would have been sufficient to sever her from the rest of her species, without the additional terror imparted by her occupation.

Sorcery was always a fruitful source of revenue among the Scandinavians. It was practised chiefly by women, partly because the reverence in which the female sex was held gave them already a sort of supernatural importance in the eyes of men, which was easily improved by art into a veneration akin to worship. Long before the time of which we write, the Roman author Tacitus speaks of the awe with which woman was regarded by the Scandinavians and Germans. He relates that there were ten priestesses for one priest in the performance of their religious rites. Women were supposed to be in closer relation to the deities of Valhalla than men, and to receive mysterious communications from them in a manner never vouchsafed to the warrior sex.

The exalted vala of the Scandinavians is not to be confounded with the disgusting hag of modern German invention or the more vulgar English witch of the days of King James I. The awe with which the Northern warriors regarded their prophetesses, or valas, is scarcely to be understood by moderns, who refuse to believe in anything but themselves. During the latter half of the ninth century this veneration had reached its culminating point.

Fulda of the "Stormy Ness" was as different a person from Brenda as can well be conceived, although they both had the reputation of being valas. She was

tall and majestic in figure ; her face was one of almost childlike delicacy, both in feature and complexion ; but the massive brow told of much power of refined thought, and the square chin and somewhat heavy jaw showed a firmness of purpose strangely at variance with the girlish innocence and wonderful simplicity of her soft blue eye, and the ultra-feminine grace imparted by the wealth of sunny golden hair that fell in rich waves to her waist.

When the man and the youth approached the vala's awful dwelling, which made bold men shudder to think of, the noise of the advancing steeds on the hard rock up which they bounded aroused two enormous black cats which were lying basking in the sun. They started up and flew through the doorway into the house, from which instantly Fulda of the "Stormy Ness," as we have described her, issued.

She was clad in dazzling white, and this, with her brilliant complexion and golden hair, gave her, as she stood opposite the setting sun, the appearance which a Christian painter would have seized upon as the embodiment of an angel of light. Quickly the visitors dismounted and bent the knee before this glorious apparition.

"Take their steeds," she exclaimed, speaking to some person or persons unseen, and two maidens, clad in simple vestments, shaped like the vala's, but differing from hers in colour, being of a dark blue, advanced rapidly from the house. These persons approached the horses, and seizing them by the bridles, led them off by the same pathway, continued to another house made of a boat inverted and fixed against the rock. It was supported on wooden pillars made from the masts of dragon ships. The main

structure, however, was a cavern, of which this marine building was merely the porch.

"Welcome, Yarl Thorkell; I have been expecting thee; come in, and bring thy friend. Sit ye on the high bank and drain a horn to the memory of good Yarl Attlé the Sea-Wolf."

"Thanks, mighty vala, we will enter; and if thou canst find a morsel of bear's ham, or goat's flesh, or an elk's tongue, or something of the kind, it would be well; for Grimm, my friend and tried adviser, is like myself, a-hungered."

Without a change of tone that might betray amusement at this singular address, the vala cried: "Come in, and what our modest larder can afford shall greet your coming and supply your needs. Come in."

The chamber to which the porch led was, unlike all other Scandinavian rooms, vaulted overhead. The centre of the floor was occupied as usual by the fire, and above the blaze the roof was hollowed into a sort of cone or funnel, narrowing towards the hole cut for the smoke to pass. The floor was nearly circular, and round the walls benches were placed in order. Opposite the door was fixed the daïs or high bank. Before the seat was a large oblong table spread with a clean linen cloth, most brilliantly white. Around the walls were twelve broad shelves or rather brackets, and on each of these a huge black cat was sitting or lying. The effect was very startling through the gloom, when the eye had become accustomed to it, just after leaving such a dazzling sunlit deep blue sky. The lurid blaze, striving to gain the roof, disclosed these animals upon the walls with a grotesque effect.

Upon the daïs was seated, clad in white, a woman

older than the vala. Her dress was covered with a mantle, also white, clasped with the pagan cross.* She looked as though she were the vala's mother.

When Grimm and Thorkell entered the vala's vault this figure never moved until they nearly reached the daïs. Beside her seat there hung a sheet of iron two feet square, suspended by a chain, and when the two had gained the daïs she seized a massive hammer that stood near her chair, and struck a single blow upon the iron plate.

Instantly two curtains, one on each side the daïs, were drawn at once asunder. From the openings thus revealed there marched two trains of white-clad maidens. Some bore wooden platters on which were put in tempting order boar's flesh, large fish, huge joints of venison of the elk, pheasants and other birds, great jars of earthenware containing wine and mead. In short, nothing was wanting for a sumptuous feast.

"Sit down, Yarl Thorkell; seat thyself, Yarl Grimm. Mother, the rites are ended. May the maidens rest and take their mid-day meal? The yarls will join us if thou wilt consent."

The elder woman bowed her head. For some time as the yarls dined, no word was spoken.

Fulda of the "Stormy Ness" then took her seat in state next to her mother's chair. Thorkell was motioned to a seat at the left hand of Fulda's aged mother, while Grimm sat at the right hand of the vala.

Then came another train of maidens clad in white, who took their seats upon the benches round the walls. More serving maidens now brought in small tables with round tops, spread each with fair white napkins. Then the meats were served, and mead

* There are many of these in the British Museum.

and wine went round, while in the centre of the floor before the daïs a harper-maiden sang the battles of the gods.

Just when the harper ceased, the cats sprang down each from her separate perch, and such a din ensued as mortal never heard. They howled as no cats ever howled before, nor would they cease until the vala cried in a strange cruel voice that seemed no voice of hers, "Tystna ! lystna ! ätta rätta !" which means in English, "Hush ! listen ! eat rats !" Here-upon the curtains were drawn aside once more, and twelve serving maidens in blue, like those who took the horses, appeared bearing rät-traps, in each of which a fine grey Norway rat was sitting. The traps were opened and the rats sprang out, to be seized and devoured by the cats.

Thorkell having taken a prodigious meal, gazed in wonder and delight at the scene before him. As each cat secured her prey, and despatched the creature notwithstanding its fierce resistance, he laughed and shouted with pleasure, and taking off a rich gold bracelet from his arm, presented it to the vala.

The cats having finished their meal, the serving-maidens sat down at the tables where the superior vala-looking girls had already dined, and then, to Thorkell's surprise, these ladies presented food to the servants who had waited on them, giving each a kiss on her brow as she sat ; and when they had eaten and drunk, the vala herself rose, and with her own hands filled out a horn and presented it to each for a draught. Then she returned to her seat on the daïs, and while the vaulted chamber was being cleared, the harper-maiden came forward, and, standing before the daïs, sang the following uncouth lay, of which we

give a very humble attempt at translation, preserving the alliteration.

SONG IN THE VALA'S VAULT.

"The rascal rat,	With dainty dish
And the cunning cat,	Of flesh and fish,
Are figures fitting	Served first her sister,
Of some here sitting !	Who in kindness kissed her,
As sagas say,	Then served her share
Rats proudly play,	Of the self-same fare ;
Till the cat, returning,	Thus truly telling
Turns mirth to mourning.	Of the duty dwelling
* * * *	In each high heart
A free folk's fate	To perform its part,
Hangs on love, not hate.	No need neglecting,
Each merry maiden	Nor rank respecting."
In high hall laden	

If Grimm ever deserved his name, it was now, when hearing this song in the vault of the vala. Thorkell looked foolish, as not knowing whether to resent the whole thing as a liberty, or to pretend either not to have understood the allusions, or to treat them as beneath his notice. He decided on the latter course, and turned smilingly to the young maiden who had sung, and rewarded her with an arm ring of some value.

Then turning to Fulda, he said : "I have come to consult thee on certain grave matters, and should be glad to speak with thee alone, or at least without this swarm of maidens."

The vala glanced at her mother, who struck the iron plate with the hammer, and the girls vanished so rapidly through the curtained aperture, that their departure seemed the work of magic.

The change in the vault was so sudden that Thorkell seemed quite to forget the presence of the vala, in his astonishment. At last she recalled him to

himself, by saying : " We are now alone. What is thy will ? " Then seeing that he looked at her mother, she said : " My mother remains ; say on."

There was a calm decision about this that left him no alternative but to say what he intended ; so he asked her, in as few words as possible : " First, whether his uncle's wish and will were really set aside by the new fancy he took to Hahkon ? Secondly, was Hahkon his uncle's real heir ? Thirdly, could the disposition of Attlé be set aside by an act of the Ting ? Fourthly, was Hahkon a prisoner ? And, lastly, how would he return ? as ransomed captive, or as victorious viking ? "

" Listen," said the vala ; and gently the following verses seemed to flow from the lips of the old woman, who, however, never moved them :

" The will of the Sea-Wolf shall ne'er be o'erthrown,
Till the men of the Northlands as nithings are known.
That will has been ever the weal of his boy,
Which no deed of the doomsman in Ting can destroy.
That Hahkon is son to the Sea-Wolf, the king
Has solemnly shown to his champions in Ting.
And the warriors of Attlé chose Hahkon beside ;
This judgment can ne'er be by fraud set aside.
As to Hahkon, this moment the mirror shall show
If the warrior be taken, and all thou wouldest know."

The voice ceased. Fulda's mother again raised her hand, and struck the iron plate with the hammer. Instantly what seemed an answering echo repeated the clang, until it sounded like the clash of arms. Then the curtain at the back of the vala's seat was torn aside, and revealed what seemed to be a brilliantly illuminated mirror of gigantic size. But instead of reflecting the four persons in the vault of the vala, it showed Hahkon in armour, standing on a shield





"GANGER . . . REARED AND FLUNG HIS RIDER FROM HIS BACK."—*A.* 217.

borne by armed warriors. His sword was in his hand, and the eagle pinions of his helmet floated bravely above the whole. The curtain fell, leaving Thorkell and Grimm in total darkness. The door leading to the pathway up the rock was thrown open, and a flood of daylight streamed into the chamber, showing it to be empty. Neither vala nor her mother was to be seen.

Thorkell and Grimm rushed from the hall, or vault, and found their horses ready for them. They mounted and rode off rapidly. On the road they met one of the inferior servants, riding furiously to meet them.

"How now!" said Thorkell; "what tidings?"

"Hasten, Yarl! There are messengers just come from the king urgently requiring thy instant presence at Framness."

"Ride back and say I shall be there anon."

The man rode off, and the two friends began to discuss the probable nature of the interview desired by Halfdan, and, in their eagerness, they never noticed that Ganger had swerved from the ill-defined road, and had gained a wild heath, on which huge masses of rude stone were cast about as if at random; here, suddenly, he reared and flung his rider from his back, so that he fell heavily with his head upon one of these ungentle pillows. The horse now struck at him with his hind legs, and the hoofs coming into contact with the boy's ribs, considerable damage was done. He then darted off at full speed in the direction of the hall, which he soon reached; and trotting up to the stable, the door of which was open, he went in and walked up to his own stall as if nothing uncommon had happened.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW HAHKON THE YARL CAME TO HALFDAN
THE KING.

THE sack of Luna was productive of great wealth to the vikings, who took possession of all kinds of lovely specimens of Roman art in massive gold and silver. But there were many vases and other vessels among these, richly adorned with sculptured forms which our untutored vikings saw with haughty indignation. For the Scandinavians were pure and moral in their lives and thoughts ; hence their complete success in driving out the vicious sons of Rome. What should they do with all these shameless things ? They could not take them home and show them as they were. How could they bring such horrid scenes before the tender eyes of youth and innocence ? Impossible ! At last it was resolved to hew them into pieces, melt them down, and take the metal in crude lumps to fashion into arm-rings. And this was done. All coins, all medals, ornaments, utensils, arms, made in the precious metals, were melted down. The prisoners taken were all slain, though many of the townsfolk fled, escaping to the plains. The men were slain because there was no ransom to be had, the women because they were not for the North, and the stern priestesses of Frigga, and the rest of those of pure Valhalla, would never let these Christian women sail in the same ships with them.

"No!" they cried; "we fear not to descend into the tomb with our own faithful champions, because we know that they would pine for us in the realms above! Why should the Christian women hesitate to follow their dead lords to bliss beyond the grave?"

Such were the thoughts that filled barbarian breasts; and as there was an old Scandinavian law forbidding marriages with any but those of the Odinic faith and Northern blood, the victors never dreamt of intermarriages with dark-haired daughters of Italy. So men, women, and children were slain.

The houses of Luna, as those in Herculaneum and Pompeii had been, were all of them more or less decorated with frescoes on their walls, which equally excited the indignation of these strange warriors, to whom life and death were matters of perfect indifference, and physical suffering was a subject for jesting; but the slightest indelicacy was visited with furious indignation. Therefore, when these house decorations met their eye, it was resolved to destroy such a nest of vice; and the houses were demolished! The walls of Luna fell! Fire and axe performed their part; and now the antiquary searches in vain for traces of the once flourishing town of Luna.

After this perfect destruction of so important a place, the vikings bore away with them enormous wealth in melted metal and precious stones. The rich dresses they consumed; they were not of their fashion, and they (the kings of the sea) were not going to *imitate* Welshmen (foreigners)! To them, their female costume was perfection. Why should they introduce a fashion from a race whose manners they

regarded with supreme contempt, and whose principles were to them revolting? So the booty was reduced to a portable form, and safely bestowed on board their ships for equal distribution amongst the champions.

But the destruction of this town had consumed more time than these impetuous natures cared to bestow upon any one adventure, and they were all impatient to return to Denmark and Norway, for the inhabitants of Sweden were generally referred to one or other of those countries by the "Welsh."

Behold them, then, at the commencement of autumn; afloat, sailing back to the North. The "Pillars of Hercules" were passed in safety, then the great ocean was reached. Sailing north by east they entered the British sea (now called St. George's Channel), where, for the weather was serene, the Frankish coast might be discerned by the starboard ships of the fleet, and Britain (as it was still named by the greater part of Europeans) by those to port.

The advanced guard was formed by Hahkon, in "Ellida"; abaft floated Orm's dragon, and those of Sigurd and Biorn supported him on either side. Then came a line of five ships strong; then other and still more lines of war ships till the base was reached, and this part of the wedge extended nearly from shore to shore!

"Ha! friend Svend," cried Hahkon to his trusty skield-unge (shield-younker) or lieutenant, whose admiration of his leader had risen a hundred per cent. since the coffin-scene at Luna, "ha! this is the way to come home after sailing far on the viking path! Gold, and silver, and gems! It was ever the Sea-Wolf's maxim that steel was better than gold!"

After passing through the British Sea, the fleet

entered upon what then was known as the Western Sea (now called the North), distinguishing it from what we call the Baltic, then the Eastern Sea. For Scandinavia proper lay between these waters, and the proud sailors of the North named them according to their situation in reference to the "nurse of heroes," Scandinavia.

They gained the Western Sea, then, one bright morning, and soon became aware that ships were formed in very strong array to bar their progress home. It was a joyful feeling for the viking crews to find themselves opposed to hardy Northern champions.

"Look yonder, Svend," said Hahkon. "There is little booty to be gained, though we have much to lose. Honour is there enough; but we must save our gold. Let us not come to Framness with the craven tale that we took the gold from Welshmen to lose it to the Danes! Pass we the war-cry to the fleet. 'Keep that we won; give nothing to the foe, not even quarter!' I hold the wedge formation. Fly the red flag with the raven. Let the lines close."

These orders were transmitted from one dragon to the other, till all had heard the "word."

Quoth Hahkon: "This will be a stubborn fight; they are the West Dane vikings. How my heart bounds with joy! For when I think of yonder reeking Rome, and all her men and women buried in her fall, I feel regret that the men folk at least had not a better death in open field. And yet they fought right bravely when we marched down the street from their much vaunted temple to the gate."

"Nithings!" said Svend, "ye were some twenty men, and they a city full of warriors! They should have chosen twenty of their best to stay and meet you

point to point. But a whole city full! Great Thor! they must have slain each other as they fought."

"Of course," said Hahkon; "and that shows us how it was that we escaped. Bah! There's a shaft struck quivering in the mast! By Thor! we'll don our helmets, Svend. If they shot up and let the arrows fall, as we did, into Rome, it might go hard with many!"

"I'll steer 'Ellida.' Don thy helmet, Yarl!"

"Nay, I shall not be helmed while other heads are bare; seek thou thy helm and mine, and take the combed caps and lay them by the mast. Let all the warriors pile their caps and don their helmets; let the slingers practise the same feat we played in Italy."

The word was passed from ship to ship, because, on account of the size of the vessels, it was possible for them to act much closer together than in modern warfare, where signals are made by flags because of the distance from each other at which our great ships act. In the latter half of the ninth century ships were very frequently chained together so as to present an impregnable front to the enemy.

Very soon the two fleets were "within range." There was no stopping for such idle questions as "What seek ye?" "Who are ye?" No; each fleet knew that there was to be as grim a sea-fight as ever tinged the billows of the "western waves" with blood, and the fight began without one useless word. Hahkon's slingers flung a shower of stones so deftly in the air, that they fell nearly perpendicularly on the heads of the foe. This was replied to by an iron hail of weighty arrows directed point blank at Hahkon's men. But these had, by his foresight, been provided each with a second shield, so that without removing

those hung on the outside of the ship, they could defend themselves with ease.

Hahkon preserved the wedge formation and did not chain his ships together, while the Danes had fastened theirs in one long line, which, being driven by their mighty oars, would, as they hoped, sweep all their foes away. But Hahkon's warriors, eager for the fray, advanced in splendid order. Opening up the "wedge" on each side of "Ellida," a front of ships was formed, such as was seldom seen. Astern of these the second line advanced, and at a sign from Hahkon (a blast upon his horn) this second line sent up its shower of darts as it had shot at Luna, and they fell with terrible effect upon the helmets of the Danes, and crashing through the leather where it was unprotected by the iron hoops, killed the wearer instantly.

Under cover of the confusion of this "pil-regn," or shower of arrows, Hahkon's men *boarded*. Brandishing their fearful double-headed axes, they sprang on board the enemy's ships, and before the surprise and confusion which ensued could subside, the tillers of the Danes were in the hands of Hahkon's men, and the heads, instead of bearing down obliquely on the "wedge," or rather line, as it had become by Hahkon's command, were placed in the most favourable position for boarding by the "reserve."

One result of this change in the direction of the prows of the Danish dragons was that the sails were taken aback, thereby increasing the confusion.

The first line of Hahkon's dragons now retired behind the second, which came up rapidly and poured a large force of boarders on the disabled Danes, who, after stubborn fight, threw down their axes and yielded themselves prisoners.

By Hahkon's command, these were ignominiously thrust down below where the horses would have been had there been any on board. But those who continued to fight, except the leaders, were cut down. These Hahkon ordered to be spared and well treated, and when the fight was over to be conveyed to his ship. For far to the right some half dozen Danes had thrown off the chain and were harassing Hahkon's fleet with clouds of arrows and javelins. And not until these had been captured or destroyed was the victory clearly in the hands of Hahkon the Sea-Eagle.

But there was no room for very much doubt on this point, and very shortly the captive vessels, each commanded by an experienced champion from Hahkon's fleet, and partly rowed by some of his men, and partly towed by some in advance of them, were moving on with him. A more complete victory has seldom, if ever, been gained at sea.

In this order, then, Hahkon's ships shaped the course to Framness, where he intended to give up the captured ships to King Halfdan as his superior lord. First came "Ellida," with Hahkon on board, then three of his ships, the centre one commanded by Orm having a Danish dragon in tow, the two others acting as guard-ships on each side. Svend was acting as what we should now-a-days call "prize master," and had his station on board at the helm or steer rudder. The other prizes were disposed of in a similar way, that is to say, each was towed by one of the victorious ships and guarded by two more.

On the second day after the fight Hahkon became aware of a strange tumult in the fleet, and ordered his rowers to pull "easy," as he wished to know the cause of the commotion. This was not long unknown.

The custom of carrying priestesses on board these ships gave rise to the introduction of other women as companions and servants to them. The women on board one of the Danish ships had actually torn down the partitions between them and the part of the ship where the men were confined, and were attacking the men with their sacrificial knives, declaring that death was no disgrace, but slavery was!

It soon got wind that this tragedy was in contemplation, and the "lady passengers" in the other dragons, animated by the same spirit, made a similar attempt on board many of the other Danes.

Hahkon ordered his "yolly," or boat, to be lowered, and he visited each of the Danish ships, when he informed his fair captives that they would be bound hand and foot for the remainder of the voyage, unless they would promise, on his sword, to refrain from any such attempts in future. But as they all indignantly refused such "parole," he ordered them to be bound as he had threatened, appointing women from his own ships to see that they wanted nothing, and to guard against repetitions of their violence.

On board the very last of the Danish dragons Hahkon observed a grey-headed warrior, who looked unutterably wretched. He wore the eagle's wings, the gold helm and jewelled belt of a yarl, but his eye had none of the fire that usually marks the champion of Odin. Pale and haggard, he sat apart, unmoved by either the forced mirth or the dogged despair of the rest. There was something about him that interested Hahkon, who stepped up to him, and freely fronting him, asked :

"What ails thee, yarl? It is the play of the

Nornas [Fates] that one should one day be victor, another not! What is that? The Norn will have her way, whatever men may do! It cannot be always summer. I was a peasant once!"

"Only in seeming; thou wert never aught but the son of Attlé the Sea-Wolf! I am a lost, dishonoured man, fit for the realms of Hela rather than Valhalla!"

"It is hard," said Hahkon, "to hear a man complain like a puling girl; come on board my ship with me, and tell me thy woes. It may be I may help thee. Halldan loves me, and will gladly do something to pleasure me; and I will crave thy freedom."

"Go with *thee*, Yarl Hahkon! That may hardly be. Thou knowest not to whom thou sayest this. Not with thee! Not with thee!"

"Why not, man? Surely thou canst not bear malice because my ships have shown themselves like dragons: bitter in biting, grim in war's game?"

"Ha!" said a warrior standing near. "There was a rub, Yarl Grimm. Grim in war's game, art thou?"

"And is thy name Yarl Grimm?"

"Ay," said the elder champion, "woe is me that ever I should blush to own it!"

"Step into my boat, and drain a horn on board 'Ellida.'

Urged by the frankness of his host and captor, the sad old yarl obeyed; and in short space they reached "Ellida," where, at Hahkon's command, the horn appeared, well filled with luscious wine.

"Drink, Grimm," said Hahkon; "drink, and tell me how I can aid thee in thy distress. Thou hast fought well; and we owe it to the brave to help them at their need."

The old man drank, but answered not a word.

Then Hahkon filled his horn again, and the old man drank. Then he started up, and swore by all the gods in Valhalla that Hahkon knew his secret.

"I!" cried Hahkon. "Why, man, I never heard thy name before to-day! How should I know thy secret, never knowing thee? That is not like a son of Odin, good Yarl Grimm!"

"Call me not good; for know that I am he who helped thy nithing kinsman to set the king against thee. Thou wilt find a scurvy welcome from King Halfdan, Yarl; and what ill-will he bears thee is my work and Thorkell's. We have given Halfdan right evil thoughts of Hahkon!"

"That is nithing work; but still, as I was ready to help thee in thy need, fearing misfortune's hand had struck thee, I shall not turn my back on thee just because I may have suffered through thy fault. If thou hast slandered me, thou wilt make it good; if thou hast wronged me very deeply, I shall demand trial of battle, or a 'duel,' when we return; at present thou art my guest, and what thou sayest is sacred."

"Then I will tell thee that thy kinsman, Thorkell, aided by me, has striven to gain the hearts of thy retainers to his side, to rob thee of thy yarldom."

"How could that bring good to thee?"

"I am a very wretch. I owe to other men more than two thousand marks, which I must pay before next Yule, or I, my wife and daughter, will be sold as slaves to pay it. Thorkell had promised to discharge this claim if I would point out to thy men in Tredalund that he was heir of right. Next, we endeavoured to raise sums of gold for thy ransom, but found this too dangerous. Finally, King Halfdan, hearing of our nithing deeds, sent for us both to Framness. Here

Thorkell strove, and not, I think, in vain, to give the merry king a bad idea of thee."

"Nithing work, Yarl Grimm!"

"It irks me that thou sayest it, but it is true. Well, when we heard that Rome had fallen by thy hand, and thou wast coming home laden with untold wealth, we thought it were a cunning deed to cut thee off, and pay my horrid debts with Roman gold."

"That was at least a worthy thought, more like a viking, Yarl."

"And so I fled to Denmark, and showing what I knew of thee and Halfdan, proposed to lead a fleet to combat thee, and of the booty I was promised gold enough to pay the loathed debt."

"At least the thought was brave, and it was well done to seek thy remedy upon the waves; for that I can forgive thee the foul deed of setting Halfdan and the rest against me. How much hast thou to pay?"

"A thousand marks would free me from the debt which threatens wife and child; from the other my good sword might free me."

"I will pay these sums. No man shall count on me in vain."

"But, Yarl, I have acted as thy foe."

"The Christians say that we should love our enemies, and when I was in England I learnt much of that faith."

"Is it, then, true, as Thorkell told the king, that thou art Christian, and wouldest lead the sons of Odin from his faith to Christ?"

"Look here, Yarl Grimm. Each freeman has the right to think as seems him best. Thought has been ever free throughout the North. When on the solemn Ting the freemen meet their thoughts are free as air,

and if they do nothing to offend the state, their thoughts should still be free. I am a son of Odin. I hate the English curs who murdered Ragnar Lodbrok, and then slew my father. Yarl Attlé left a heritage of vengeance to his son, which is in part repaid."

"And yet thou speakest of forgiveness to a foe as mean and base and vile as I! By Thor, it is too deep for me!"

"Now listen, Grimm, and thou wilt understand. There are some teachings in the Christian creed which must and will prevail over some parts of ours. I am a son of Odin, I will obey my father; but I believe that these same Christian dogs have one or two grand thoughts worthy of our Valhalla. One of these is, that to those who really do feel sorry for a fault we should extend forgiveness. Thou art most clearly sorry for the wrong that thou hast done to me, and I shall try their plan frankly and freely to forgive thee. The English are not sorry that they killed the yarl, my father. To them forgiveness were a waste, a sin, a wrong to my dead father and to me. I never will forgive them."

The youth's eye glared with concentrated rage as thus he spoke of England. Grimm looked puzzled, but at last he said :

"It may be so. I never sought forgiveness, but I was grieved to think that I had acted such a knavish part towards thee. If it be real, I take it as I took my life from thee, who had the power to slay me. I would not die a rascal's death and go to Hela as a nithing! And for thy offer to assist my need, I take it frankly. Further, as thou hast made no bargain in this peace, that I should do a like good turn by thee, I swear upon my bracelets, and upon thy sword, to

help thee more with Halfdan than I yet have injured thee."

"Well, I shall try this Christian plan with thee, quite without any bargain on my part. Thy sword and shield shall be delivered up on landing, and if thou wilt we shall be 'friends.'"

The old man's eyes seemed strangely affected. He said nothing, but walked forward to the prow.

Nothing of much importance happened to the fleet. They came in sight of Framness, where the king, with many armed retainers, held the cliffs. And as the fleet put into Framness bay, a dragon came to meet them, and to ask what they required in those waters, who they were, and whence they came.

Then said Hahkon: "I am Hahkon Attléson, and bring King Halfdan all the conquered spoil seized in the sack of Rome, besides some ships of war sent to oppose us as we were returning. These I bring as prizes to King Halfdan, begging him to share them with my warriors."

"If thou art Hahkon, thou shalt come with me unarmed before King Halfdan."

Hahkon started. This was equivalent to making him a prisoner, depriving him of freedom, the greatest privilege a Northern yarl could boast.

"Nay," he replied, "thou hast not understood thy message to me rightly, friend. Unarmed before the king, when sailing home with booty and with prizes? No, it is some mistake. I will go with thee quite alone, but not unarmed, by Thor!"

"Such were the king's commands."

"I doubt it much, my friend; but I will go with thee without my javelin and spear, armed only with my sword."

"As thou wilt, Yarl Hahkon. I fear me thou art wrong, but thou must have thy will. I know the king is not in merry mood just now, and will, perhaps, chafe at thy bold defiance of his will!"

Here Yarl Grimm stepped forward, and begged the young commander of the ship to allow him to accompany him to the king, stating who he was, how he had been taken prisoner by Hahkon, and how he had been liberated.

After a little hesitation, leave was granted, and Hahkon, after placing a trusty warrior at the helm, sent word to Orm to take command, bidding him to take revenge in case he (Hahkon) fell.

When this had been arranged, he prepared to follow the yarl who had been sent to carry him to Halfdan.

The king had formed a Ting upon King Belé's grave, and when young Hahkon reached the lower circle, there was some demur as to his being admitted, orders having been issued that none of the returning fleet should be admitted to the Ting in arms.

"For that reason have I left my javelin and spear on board, and come unarmed, which is itself a shame; but I appear not in the throng of yarls without my sword and shield."

This speech was carried up to Halfdan, who received him with an angry scowl.

"How now, Yarl Hahkon? Set at nought my wish, my positive commands? I told thee thou shouldst come unarmed before me in the Ting!"

"Therefore I left my spear and javelin on board; but I can send and fetch them, if thou wilt!"

"Less haughtiness, proud boy! bethink thee where thou art! Remember who I am!"

"My haughtiness is inborn, good lord King. Speech is free here in this Northern land. I do be-think me where I am, on thy dead father's grave, who was the soul of freedom and the right. Remembering thou art his son, the friend of my dead father, I ask to know wherefore I am insulted by being ordered to appear unarmed ? "

"No traitor to the faith bears arms upon the Ting."

"Who dares to call me traitor ? He that does so is a foul liar, and a nithing slave, with whom I claim combat. But until I'm proved to be a traitor, I have every right to arms, and thou hast none to order me to leave them outside the Ting of warriors, unless they meet for peace, and here, I trow, seeing the rest with spears, the talk will be of war ! "

Here the yarls, who were jealous of any infringement upon the privileges of their order, drew their swords and struck the usual note of applause with the blades on their shields.

Halfdan waited until the storm subsided, and then said :

"Grave charges have been made against Yarl Hahkon Attléson. I shall call upon the Ting to help me in deciding on his guilt. I call Yarl Thorkell to appear and to maintain his charge against his kinsman Hahkon, whom we admit to Ting."

Hereupon an opening was made amidst those warrior rings, and Thorkell issued forth upon the space between the stone of doom and the first ring of warriors. When he appeared, there was no song of shields called forth by gleaming blades. All was as hushed upon the grave as it was beneath it ; such was the Scandinavian way of expressing indignation and dislike.

Nothing could present a greater contrast than the appearance of the two young men. The erect and unconstrained bearing of the youthful chief, and the unswerving glance of his truthful eye, won all beholders, while the uneasy manner, slouching gait, and restless eye of Thorkell seemed to bear witness to meanness and indecision, if not absolute falseness.

"What hast thou to allege against Yarl Hahkon Attléson?" demanded Halfdan, who had mounted the "doom-stone," or seat of judgment.

"That he is false to his oath of fealty to thee, in that he strives to turn the hearts of his retainers more to himself than to thee?

"Secondly, that instead of being the true son of Odin he pretends, he is at heart a Christian.

"Thirdly, that being the son of a herdsman he by dint of subornation of witnesses and other low arts, contrived to bring Yarl Attlé, now deceased, to acknowledge him as his son who had died in infancy.

"In proof of these charges, I summon Yarl Grimm of Barnangen, who will bear witness that the so called Hahkon is a vile impostor; that he has endeavoured to lead his men from thee; and that he is a Christian. And I call upon the blind peasant Brenda to answer to the charge of aiding and abetting this self-styled yarl in the assumption of rank and dignity belonging of right to me."

An ominous stillness prevailed; no applause left the rings on its flight to Valhalla, to call down blessings from on high, such as always follow free and noble speech.

A messenger was sent to the burg, to bring the old blind Brenda to the Ting, and Halfdan spake.

"These are grave charges, warriors and friends,

and it behoves me, as a Northern king, to try this matter justly. I name twelve yarls in the olden course, to help me to decide. I choose these twelve, one for each district, and if either Thorkell or his kinsman Hahkon be discontented with such choice of mine, he has the right to name another in his stead."

This was applauded, and the her-alder (ruler of the host ; our modern herald) read out twelve much-honoured names.

As neither Hahkon nor Thorkell offered any objection to these names, the Ting was arranged for judgment.

As the trial was civil, a silver ring of large size was carried by a priest before the king ; the twelve judges, godars, or doomsmen (still living in our jury), came forward, and grasping the hand of the king through the hoop, swore upon it to judge righteous judgment. Then a number of hazel rods were placed upright in the earth, and a white silk cord was stretched from each to each, until the whole mound was encircled.

This was always done when a cause was tried at a distance from the grand judgment stones, set up in circles in various parts of Scandinavia and in England. There was a peculiar sanctity in the circular form which rendered it well adapted to the holy cause of justice.

Scarcely was this complete, and the twelve yarls forming the jury ranged in a ring round the doom-stone of the king, when the messenger returned with Brenda, to whom a seat was given near the king. All the rest remained standing.

The first witness called by Thorkell was Yarl Grimm, who, on being asked whether he could prove

that Thorkell had spoken the truth regarding Hahkon, replied :

" I know nothing about the falseness of Yarl Hahkon to King Halfdan. I only know that, having visited all the cotholders, landholders, and labourers under him, I found them all most loyal. I regret to say that I was induced by Yarl Thorkell, at a time of bitter need, to try to lead the men of Tredalund to rise against their lord. I found them ever faithful to the king, because Yarl Hahkon having been received and recognised by him, they thought it nithing work to listen to a claim set up against that yarl."

Then Halfdan spoke right sternly.

" Thou hast confessed a very nithing deed. How canst thou prove it ? for thy own confession is scarce to be believed."

Here Brenda exclaimed : " Good king and mighty yarls, that can I. Fulda of the Stormy Ness has told me how the nithings sought her cave, how they required her to aid them in gaining over men to Thorkell's plot. Fulda is still in bower ; so please you, send for her, and she will prove the tale."

" What think ye, yarls and warriors ? Shall we entreat the vala to appear ? "

Then arose an aged warrior, with his grey beard in exquisite order, floating over his breast, and he said :

" I think not, O king, that further evidence is wanting. Yarl Hahkon was acknowledged by Attlé the Sea-Wolf as his son ; and this, according to our ancient laws, makes him his son whoever he may be."

Here the speaker was interrupted by the sounding clang of the sword and shield making applausive din. " Warriors and yarls, king and champions of Odin, I thank you for your applause ; but I wish you to

know, with regard to Hahkon's Christianity, what I just have heard : he has destroyed the seat of Christendom, great Rome itself, and comes here laden with great booty from the sack. My yeoman tells me that the Christian images have all been melted down, so that they should not serve to lead our youth astray."

Metallic applause from the iron rings of men.

"Who else," quoth Halfdan, "has aught against Yarl Hahkon ?"

Not a sound was heard, and Halfdan gazed around and waited some further accusation, but all was hushed. Then spoke the aged Yarl Frithioff :

"King Halfdan, I have observed that the whole of this foul accusation comes from the lips of yonder dastard nithing and Yarl Grimm, who owns he was his tool. Under other circumstances, I should have advised to call the vala Fulda, to question the good Brenda, and to adjourn the Ting to have the witnesses from Hahkon's ships. But this would take up time (too much has now been wasted), and Hahkon's reception is not of the best ! After much action he returns at last to be accused as nithing. Warriors, this is not well, and now I claim my right to ask a question, with the good king's consent."

"Say on, Yarl Frithioff ; ask him what thou wilt."

"Well, then," said Frithioff, "I will ask two things : 'first, Art thou loyal to King Halfdan ?'

To which Hahkon replied : "Most loyal, on my sword ; most loyal, by the ring. In war and peace I have been loyal to my king, refusing Attlé's offer to take arms with him, and doing champion's duty only in Halfdan's name. Now for thy second question."

The applause was greater than it had been before, as sword met shield rejoicing in this answer.

"I ask thee, Art thou a Christian?"

"I was baptized in England, but left the Christian faith because I saw the Christians do not practise what they teach; they do not honour Christ whom they pretend to serve, and so I left the nithings. They slew my father. I have vowed revenge, and Halfdan saw me in the summer gone cutting the dastards down."

"Wilt thou, in proof of thy sincerity, join with the sons of Ragnar Lodbrok, and ravage England in the spring?"

"I swear it on my sword."

This was again received with clangour of applause, and another warrior spoke:

"We all believe, King Halfdan, that Yarl Hahkon speaks the truth; but I would fain, with thy consent, ask him one question."

"Say thy say, and ask thy fill."

"Well, then, Yarl Hahkon, it has seemed to me rather the work of a Christian than of a son of Odin, so frankly to forgive a foe as thou forgavest Grimm. Canst thou explain it?"

"It is the maxim of the Christians to forgive their enemies, but they never do it. *Our* maxim is to slay the foe; but what says the viking code?

"Who repents him of wrong, or who sues thee for peace,
Has no sword, is no longer thy foe:
Repentance is daughter of Valhall' on high,
He is nithing who meets her with no!"

This very apt quotation was received with a storm of applause such as seldom, if ever before, had gladdened the hearts of brave men met for justice.

Then quoth King Halfdan: "Champions and yarls! These accusations have been brought before

me as the king ; whatever my opinion was, my duty clearly was to show no favour either to Thorkell or to Hahkon. Ye have declined the other witnesses suggested by our yarls. Now it remains to try two other methods, of which one must be followed. First stands the trial by battle in the proper course. This I imagine would hardly be accepted, nor could I countenance a battle between kinsmen. In fact, Yarl Yalmar, in my name, forbade such duel. There remains the ‘compurgation,’ which I now recommend. Such of you as are of opinion that Yarl Hahkon is in fault, and side with Thorkell’s accusation, withdraw aside with him. Such as believe Yarl Hahkon innocent, remain here, on the mound, **WITH ME !** This is not spoken to the twelve alone, but to the whole assembly. According to the ancient law, we shall find who is the guilty party by the general voice. Yarl Frithioff counts.”

This plan was greeted with intense applause. And when Yarl Frithioff went to count his side, Yarl Thorkell stood alone !

“Guilty !” cried Halfdan. “Nithing, thou hast had the fairest triai ever Northman knew. I even smothered all my love for Hahkon that justice might have play. No voice is raised for thee ; no man is on thy side. Thy doom is death as nithing. Thou shalt be taken by the common sort, and stoned to death where two roads cross. No mound shall mark thy grave, a heap of stones shall fence thy corse from wolves, but not a mound of honour nor a funeral stone shall show where thou art laid.”

“King Halfdan,” interrupted Hahkon ; “if I have won thy favour, remember Thorkell is nephew to my dead father ! Pray, then, reverse his doom. Give him

a chance. He may repent if he but live. He cannot if he dies. I pray thee of thy kingship, banish him, but save his life.

"Thou art the youngest of our yarls ; perhaps thou art the dearest to my heart, hardly excepting Frithioff, and Yalmar who now is absent hunting. So dear art thou, that I cannot refuse to grant thy first boon on returning. Be it so ! Thorkell is banished, but no trace of rank shall live in such a frame. Let the smiths forge a fetter for his neck, that binds him *thrall* for ever. On the ring the herald shall inscribe 'Thorkell, the thrall.' Break up the Ting !"

Deafening metallic applause flew to Valhalla's plains. The joyous yarls placed Hahkon on a shield, and bore him high in triumph to the burg. And as they passed, Thorkell was struck with awe, the scene resembled so the mirrored group shown in the vala's vault.

Fulda of the Stormy Ness was standing with the queen Freydisa (then only called *the lady*), and she laughed. "See yonder !" said the vala. "My merry maidens formed me such a group when Thorkell and the other rascal sought my cave. They looked such champions in their dress of war, I question whether yonder yarls are much more terrible, in show ; at least, in show !"

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW HAHKON THE YARL SAILED TO THE
SONS OF RAGNAR LODBROK.

GREAT was the triumph in which Yarl Hahkon entered the hall at Framness. Never had any decision of a Northern Ting been so unanimous. And soon was Hahkon seated on the high bank, next the king, with the stout old Frithioff on his other hand, and good Yarl Yalmar, just returned from hunting, beyond him, with Orm on the dais, as well as some of his leading champions, who had much distinguished themselves. Sigurd and Biorn were there; so were Svend and those who had borne the *body* to the church.

Merrily passed the horn, and merrily laughed King Halfdan and his men. Gladly glanced Freydisa, Fulda, and the ladies of the burg at those brave sons of war! But the merriest moment of the day was when Yarl Hahkon told them how he gained the gate. The coffin, and the service for the dead, the warrior in his mail within; all this afforded food for fierce and boisterous mirth!

"Didst thou not laugh? Good Hahkon, tell me that. Had I been in the coffin, and yonder priests had read their requiem over my dead bones as thine, I should have roared with laughter."

"Thou art Halfdan the Merry," said Hahkon, "and for that cause there would have been a laugh. But I was far too anxious touching my 'mourners' to

have the power of laughter. Perhaps when I have seen as much as thou, I, too, may be able to laugh."

This was well received by Halfdan, who, grasping a horn of wine, cried : " Health! to thee, Hahkon!" and all around the hall resounded " Hurrah ! "

" Now I must speak to thee of Tredalund," continued Halfdan. " Listen to the tale."

Here Halfdan described at length all the events that happened in Hahkon's absence, not even forgetting Ganger's skilful act.

" It was a scurvy trick of Ganger. He has carried me more than two years, and never threw me once, and never showed the least bad temper ! "

" The faithful horse scorned to bear Hahkon's foe ! And such a foe ! Well, thy kinsman lay some time in a most woeful plight ; and I went over just to hear how Tredalund was thriving, and there the vala, Lady Fulda of the 'Stormy Ness,' sent word that she would gladly see me touching thy foul kinsman."

" And thou hast seen her cave ? "

" Her cave and all her kittens ; and never laughed so much as when she told me how she frightened Grimm and the other warrior ! Ha ! ha ! ha ! with half-a-score of maidens, and a dozen cats ! Champions, a health ! Pledge me the Lady Fulda of the 'Stormy Ness,' her kittens, and her maidens. Ha, ha, ha ! "

Then were the mead horns emptied in honour of the vala and her train, and perhaps no healths in all the North caused such enthusiasm !

" She told me," continued Halfdan, " how Thorkell asked her aid to set aside thy claim ; demanded how a will like Attlé's could be unmade by act of Ting, and many other mean and knavish questions. She

frightened him away at last, and Ganger finished the adventure.

"When Thorkell seemed recovered from his hurts I sent for him and Grimm. Thorkell arrived, but Grimm had fled to Denmark. I now assumed an interest in the cause, and made thy kinsman formally accuse thee, with what result we know. Hence my not over friendly greeting ; for, as the king and judge, I dared not show more friendship to one side than to the other. Now we are friends once more !"

"If we were ever foes, King Halfdan, it never was my fault."

The warrior hands were grasped in friendly clasp, and the vast hall resounded with, "Health to King Halfdan the Merry ; health to Yarl Hahkon the brave." And the fair maidens with their golden locks passed behind the settles, and filled the heroes' horns, shining like glory hovering over the stubborn ranks of war.

Then the vala Fulda of the "Stormy Ness," taking a harp from an attendant, sang the following extemporary lay in praise of the vikings :

Oh ! a lordly life doth the viking live,
Afloat on the wild sea wave !
And the gods a welcome gladly give
On high to their heroes brave.

The champion chosen, or chieftain born,
Must in head and in heart be strong ;
Must fell his foemen, or drain his horn
Best of all in the belted throng.

He rides his war-horse, he rows his bark,
He bends the billows' pride ;
And a war song clangs from his ringēd sark,*
On field, or on foaming tide.

* Shirt of mail.

His blade he loves with a brave man's love,
For it gathers him goods and gold ;
And it leads him at last to the land above,
Where Bragé blesses the bold.

Other lays were sung ; and then the Lady Freydisa rose, and accompanied by Fulda of the "Stormy Ness," left the hall for the bower. As she passed behind Hahkon, she said, in her most winning tones :

"Yarl Hahkon must, if possible, winter with us in Framness."

"Ha!" cried Halfdan the Merry, "well said, wife! Here he is welcome as the sun in June, but I trow he has his own place to order and attend to. At all events, he stays some time with us. We must see the spoils of Rome."

Then ensued the more serious work of debating on the various deeds of the respective warriors, who were greatly given to boasting. In northern phrase, they "drank to Bragé," the god of history and poetry. From this expression of our remote ancestors, our verb to brag is a remnant. Many horns were emptied, and much mead, and even wine, consumed; for out of the ruins of Luna, a dragon-load of rich wine from the far-famed "vats of Luna" had been brought as a special gift for the king; and a huge cask had been rolled up to the hall, from which the horns were supplied until the whole was gone!

The next day a grand inspection of the ships was made, and the captured Danish vessels were all formally presented to Halfdan, to whom Hahkon offered the customary tenth part of the other booty, as sovereign. This the king refused to take, requesting Hahkon to present it to his warriors, in his (Halfdan's) name. A grand meeting, therefore, was

appointed on a certain day, after the warriors of the fleet had met the king in Stor-Ting, or grand parliament, of the estates of the kingdom.

The inspection was most satisfactory, for the ships were in excellent condition : the loss of men was not great, considering the deed done of destroying the power of Rome. For, up to this time, it was currently reported that Rome had been reduced to ashes by Hahkon and his fleet. Halfdan had something to say on board of each ship, which pleased the warriors, and for king and vikings it was a triumph.

This expedition differed from those generally called viking trips, in being under the control of one supreme head and in the service of a king. Generally each commander was a "king"; a *viking* on his own account, and considered all the booty he took the property of himself and crew. The present arrangement had given unusual success to the expedition, on account of the power it afforded of concentrating so much force. It exercised great influence on the subsequent fate of England, as we shall see hereafter.

The priestesses and other women of the fleet had been well cared for. Some of them were in bower with the Lady Freydisa. Others had friends amongst the neighbouring yarls and freeholders to whom they had gone on landing. Others besought King Halfdan to allow them to sail to Tredalund ; and as the vala, Fulda of the "Stormy Ness," had decided on leaving Framness for Tredalund, Halfdan now suggested that two of the larger dragons should be equipped specially for the service of the ladies. To the supreme command Orm had been appointed ; but to Halfdan's great surprise Hahkon requested that Grimm might be substituted.

"Is it wise, friend Hahkon," said the king, "to allow a man, who has avowed himself a nithing knave, to enjoy a post of such distinction. Will it not foster discontent among thy men to see the known unworthy in a place of trust?"

"I have no murmurs amongst those I lead. Murmuring is mutiny in Hahkon's code. I am a generous leader; but he who murmurs once will never grumble more. I heave him overboard at sea, or cut him down ashore."

"I see thy discipline is perfect; but why select this man, this nithing, for an honourable post?"

"King Halfdan, there are reasons. The man is not all evil: he is deep in debt——"

"That is a nithing trick, Yarl Hahkon!"

"It all depends, King Halfdan. His daughter and his granddaughter, it seems, have thought it fitting, as children of a yarl, to live with too much splendour. To give them all they craved the poor old yarl has sunk his soul in debt."

"The more fool he. Had he but told these women he was poor, and they must live like peasants, he would have left an honoured name to flourish on his grave-mound; as it is, the men write him nithing!"

"Nay, King Halfdan, he has repented of his nithing deeds, and I will pay the money. Thus, he is free; his children happy, and, if thou wilt allow it, he shall have another start in life."

"Do as thou wilt, the dragons are thine own. I only warn thee as a friend."

Thus Hahkon gained his point, and Grimm sailed with the ladies.

The Ting which Halfdan held respecting Hahkon's booty was highly pleasing to the yarl, the king

and warriors. Halfdan presented all his share of the rich booty to the men, as we have said above ; and Hahkon parted his between the ladies of the fleet and other persons at Tredalund, whose poverty required aid. For himself, he claimed the honour of having conquered Rome.

After much courtesy on both sides, Halfdan and Hahkon parted before the ice set in. Hahkon and Orm reached Tredalund rich in their honours, still richer in the people's love, and richest in their own for one another.

Years flew by as usual. Beneath the sooted roof Hahkon received his friends. When summer came he sailed with Orm on viking ventures, and then, enriched with booty, returned to Tredalund. On one of these occasions he found three visitors awaiting his return. Yarl Grimm, his daughter, and his granddaughter, who came to render thanks to Hahkon for his good deeds to them. Grimm seemed another creature, bold and frank and free ; the ladies were more simple than Hahkon had conceived ; but as he found out afterwards, Grimm had so exposed their fault in loving too much show and state, that they seemed crushed with shame. Right gentle, quiet ladies had these two dames become.

"What cheer, Yarl Grimm?" said Hahkon. What tidings hast thou brought? Ladies, my foster-mother, Brenda, will be right glad to know you. Ho! groom, convey these ladies quickly to the bower, and see that they are duly cared for. Now, Grimm, thy tidings? It is long since last we met!"

"It seems a strange and wondrous thing to say, but save the ruins made two hundred years ago, Rome is untouched and flourishing!"

"Have a care, Grimm. I mean right well by thee, but it is past all bearing. Why, man, I myself, with this right hand, cut down——! Well, never mind ; but nothing stood of Rome when I last saw the Mediterranean."

"I doubt not that thou hast destroyed a town, but *Rome was not the city*. To me it seems that Luna was the place which thou didst sack, not Rome."

"If this be so, Halfdan will think I lie. It is most galling ! Grimm, what shall I do ?"

"Say, when thou knowest of a truth that this is so, that varlets led thee to a Roman town which thou didst sack as Rome. But I am glad I heard it, otherwise men might have called thee liar, and proved that Rome still stands. I come in haste to tell thee."

"Have my thanks. It matters little now, because I sail for England in a week. Hast heard, the sons of Lodbrok are engaged to ravage all the north and eastern coasts to avenge their father's murder. Three sons of Lodbrok are engaged, but Hubba takes command. I join them with my Swedes. Wilt come ? I think a little stir like that would ease thy mind and give thy thoughts more rest. The ladies, they could rest with Brenda, or go at once to Halfdan."

"I like thy plan, but have no ship ; am glad to feel the pressure of that debt removed. And that I owe to thee."

"Pooh ! nonsense, man ! Thou wouldest have done the very same by me ; of that I'm sure. So say no more of that. Halfdan would be right glad to know my thought in that affair was right ! But now to business. About this English war. Thou knowest Ethelwulf is dead, and Ethelred is now the king of the West Saxon folk. But he must be a mighty man

of war indeed to stand against our army of revenge ! Eight kings and twenty yarls have joined the mighty force."

"It is a mighty gathering. I would fain be one of the avengers, but cannot buy or build a ship."

"Let not that trouble thee. If thou wilt, thou shalt command the 'Wolf,' a twenty-four oared dragon, if thou art not too proud."

"Thou art the best and truest friend I ever had, good Hahkon, and I accept thy offer with very great delight. When can I go on board?"

"This moment, if thou wilt. It wants two hours of mid-day yet, and that is ample time. Drain first a horn of mead, and we ride down together."

The weather was lovely, and the two vikings rode down to the noble ships which were getting ready to put with speed to sea. They waited but for Hahkon to set sail.

There were but twelve equipped, for many of Hahkon's friends had joined the sons of Lodbrok directly, with their men. And sailing under Hubba's standard, why should they wait for Hahkon? As it was, each chief took his retainers to swell the Danish fleet. And without returning to Tredalund, Hahkon and Grimm set sail and soon were off the Danish coast.

In those days there was a well-defined distinction between Britain and England. The term Britain was generally used to denote the whole island, geographically ; but politically Britain meant Wales, while England meant those parts of the island in which the Angles had become firmly seated ; much as the expression America refers to the whole of the vast western continent, while New England, with its Boston, Waltham, and other places named after

beloved spots "at home," would tend to render that continent a larger England, as Britain became a larger Anglia.

Ethelwulf, or, as his son Alfred calls him, Athulf, had died after having been deposed by his son Ethelbald, who, however, did not long survive him. "At his death the kingdom of Wessex became the possession of Ethelbert, his brother, who had been already reigning in Kent, Surrey, and Sussex." But his tenure was a short one, and after a very troubled reign of about six years' duration he died, and was succeeded by his brother Ethelred, who was scarcely seated on his brother's throne before the great Scandinavian confederacy began to arrive.

The great fault of the English nation is unwillingness to serve under leaders. Every Englishman thinks himself not only as good as another, but better than he. Consequently, there is always disunion, always contention, and quarrels; parties strive in the heart of the country, not for the good of the whole, but for the success of a clique. And in the old days of which we write, this feeling was very strong. The Angles had separated themselves from the other Scandinavians, and had allied themselves with the less Scandinavian Saxons. Pent up with these in the little island of Britain, they indulged in their natural propensity to quarrel amongst themselves, and thus prepared the way for the ravages of their kindred Danes.

When the Northern fleet suddenly appeared off East Anglia it found four distinct governments established, dividing its natural force, whose narrow policy saw nothing but triumph and safety in the destruction of each other. One of these, the peculiar object of

the hostility of the North, was plunged in civil warfare.

Of this state of affairs, so favourable to an invasion, Hubba and Ingvar (in Denmark) had been well informed; but on hearing that Hahkon of Tredalund Orm of the iron hand, and Grimm of Barnangen, with twelve ships had appeared and expressed a desire to join the fleet, they sent messengers in smaller craft to meet them, and say that they would sail out of the harbour and meet Yarl Hahkon on board his dragon.

Great was Hahkon's surprise at this unexpected act of courtesy. He dismissed the messengers with rich gifts of golden bracelets, and sent warriors from his ship to call Yarl Grimm and Orm to come to him in haste.

When they had arrived, it was agreed to receive the Danish chiefs with every mark of deep respect and deference. The steering-place was prepared with great magnificence. Hahkon had bought from the more needy champions rich tapestries from the sack of Luna, and these were now arranged upon the quarter-deck, to form a carpet for the sons of Lodbrok. Right aft two benches were fixed, each large enough for one, and these were covered with the richest tapestry that ever mortal saw. A common bench of the plainest deal was fixed on either side of these, and at right angles to them. Each of these plainer seats was made to hold two persons. Farther forward, nearer to the mast, more covered seats were placed. From the mast-head the red flag floated with the raven, black as night, with outspread wings and open beak. The warriors wore their chain mail armour, and their helms. The gilded shields hung thickly round the sides. The bows and figure-head (the

dragon's head and breast), the soaring tail curving above the stern, all were most richly gilt. This, with the flashing mail and shining arms, gave such a picture of viking war as seldom had been seen.

"Ah!" exclaimed Orm, springing on board "Ellida" clad in his mail, and wearing the belt of knight and soaring eagle's pinions in his helm. "Ah! brother mine, this is a goodly sight."

"It is a goodly sight. Here come the Danes! Shall we throw over ropes, with rattlins fixed to them to make an easy ladder, or shall we give them just a rope to climb, no more?"

"I say the rope alone," said Orm, "for if we throw them such a '*maiden's ladder*' out, methinks they would resent it as an insult. I should!"

"I think thou art right, Orm. Throw them ropes, but see the gangway tended, and let two ropes with rattlins be in readiness in case they take it ill to be no better served."

The boat with the two brothers now came alongside, and the rope was thrown over, up which they climbed, armed as they were in mail, and wearing the heavy Danish sword, itself no slight burden to carry up a rope.

When Hubba and Ingvar reached the deck, they glanced at the champions round, and seeing the rope-ladder lying ready to be used, Hubba exclaimed: "How now, keep ye your ladders for yourselves, and throw your friends a rope? Scant courtesy, methinks!"

"Not so," said Hahkon; "we were not sure whether the daughters of great Ragnar might visit us or no, and so I had this made for them. Pardon me, but I should have deemed it more courteous

had any one presumed to offer Danish sailors such dainty footing, when a rope was near."

"Not bad, Ingvar," said the haughty Dane.
"What thinkest thou; is it true?"

"Let us go aft and talk," said Ingvar. "Thou art Hahkon. Thou hast been in England. Why dost thou hate the English?"

"They slew my father, Attlé, called the Sea-Wolf."

"Good cause, and holy!" answered Hubba. "Attlé was Ragnar's friend, so we have common cause; give me thy hand, young man, I like thy ways!" A hand grip followed, that had squeezed a modern dandy's fist to pulp. They reached the quarter-deck, and Ingvar started. "Why this state?" quoth he. "Why all these carpets and fall-lall embroideries? We seek revenge, not pleasure!"

"The greatest pleasure that a viking knows," said Hahkon, "is his vengeance. So far, then, this will be a pleasure trip. As to the carpets; out of courtesy, being unused to stately visitors, we raised a faint attempt at state for your more meet reception!"

"I like it not," said Hubba. "Here one moment will he treat us roughly with his rope, keeping his ladder hid, the next he gives us gaudy tapestries for seats, enthroning us like kings."

"I thought ye were kings, vikings, kings of the waves, and therefore sought to throne you on my ship, the true and real throne of Danish lords. I pray you, humour this poor whim of mine!"

"Not I," said Ingvar; "thou and Grimm shall sit upon yon high bank; we take the lower seats, more meet for such rough blades as I and Hubba. Sit ye down."

Hahkon and Grimm complied without a word, and Orm presented these two rough-hewn Danes with a rich horn of wine. This was received more graciously, and after sundry copious draughts, the stern rough bearish nature of the Danes relaxed.

“So thou wilt have revenge ! Well, that we can promise thee, but thou must teach us something. Thou knowest somewhat of these English churls, these pudding-headed Angles ! Dost thou believe it best to fall on them in force at once ?”

“I think it would be best to sail along their coast, from Deira down to where the East Saxons dwell, then find where fighting happens to be going on. They are always fighting, more or less, all round the ‘holy island.’ ”

“Nay !” interrupted Ingvar, “I should say the better plan would be to sail due south, and land at Dover; for the men of Kent, I hear, are very peaceful. We might land without the least resistance, then march on, eastward or westward (I am not quite clear which), until we come to Mercia, then the whole of the West Saxon land is ours ! What ! is the plan a good one ? Know ye better ?”

“Yes,” replied Hahkon, “I approve the plan as far as vengeance on the men of Kent is sure, for they slew Attlé Sigurdson, my great and far-famed father. There am I with thee, Ingvar Ragnarson ; but we must make our vengeance sure and steady. We must not *risk* defeat ; and if we land upon a peaceful coast, the churls will fly to arms. The whole of Kent would meet us, and then the men of Wessex are under the same crown, so are the men of Surrey. Thus we should have three provinces combined to crush us on our landing.”

Said Hubba, "We must not seek mere vengeance, Yarl; we look for gain and glory, with revenge!"

"That is but right and fitting; but consider first my plan before ye act. Ye owe the greatest debt of hate to the Northumbrian coast. There ye will always find two parties madly warring. Land amongst armed men, your glory is far greater than landing on the peaceful part of Britain, which Kent is for the moment. Land in Northumbria, where Ragnar was destroyed; and the two warring parties pause to see which we attack, and, trow my words, so glad will they be when they see the other side attacked, they are sure to join our host and aid us in the war, if we destroy those who oppose them. There is no hate in all the world like faction hate in England."

"The nithings! encourage foreign foes for vengeance on their kinsmen! Nay, Hahkon, this is strange, most marvellous, and vile!"

"But thou wilt find it true if thou wilt hasten thither. Just now, your father's murderers are met in civil strife. Take my advice; we have not only half the foes to combat, but gain as our allies those who had helped to slay us, had we arrived too late. I mean, after peace was made!"

"Then thou wouldst counsel instant action?"

"I would make no delay; no, not an hour would I tarry; you should not say farewell to sister, wife, or bride, but *take them with you*. Mark my words, we shall have time enough to want the pleasant home, the sooted roof, the smile that nerves the warrior. Such as need these things should take them with them to Northumberland, and *winter there!*"

"How!" exclaimed Hubba, "winter there in Britain?"

"Ay, my good lord ! Bethink thee. All the wars made by the Danes on England have brought us nothing, hardly glory, nothing but the gold that has been paid to some bold vikings to ensure a peace ; ha ! ha ! ha ! as if the peace which they should buy of me could bind Yarl Ingvar or King Halfdan ! This, by the way. Our fault has ever been to leave the country as we conquered it. Our vikings sailed back home and drank the foaming mead, and rested from their labours under the sooted roof ! And all that time the English gained more gold, renewed their stricken ranks, until our work had to be done again ! Now, this is a foul fault. This time, so please you, yarls, we winter on the soil that we have won, and when the spring returns, we shall be on the spot to follow up our conquests !"

This was said with great vivacity and enthusiasm, and the warriors on board, as well those in Hahkon's band as those of Hubba's train, applauded in the fashion which they loved so well.

The sons of Lodbrok pondered. Ingvar at length arose, and thus addressed the warriors :

"Yarls, champions, freemen, Northmen, Swedes, and Danes ! Ye all have heard the wisdom spoken by Hahkon the yarl. His cause is ours, revenge ; but he is wiser far than we have ever been in following up that object. We have hitherto just thrown away our lives in useless slaughter, giving the English time to heal the wounds we gave. By Thor ! it shall be otherwise on this new 'pleasure trip,' as Hahkon rightly calls it. And, as he wisely says, we ought to take our wives with us, and winter in the land. I, therefore, mean to give each warrior five days' leave to fetch his wife on board. Those who have none shall stay and aid the

woodwrights to build the bowers for our Northern
brides, down in the hold of all our dragon ships."

This met with loud and boisterous applause.
Then uprose Hubba, fiercer of the twain, and spoke
in words like these :

"Friends and brothers ! We like Yarl Hahkon's
plan, but, like a good commander, he thinks far more
of others than himself. Home joys he gives us
who have woman's love to light and bless a home. A
wife's fond smile makes bright the sooted roof, and the
dim smoke that rises from the hearth in the high hall
in winter is changed to rosy clouds by her glad glance
alone. But Hahkon is so young that I am well nigh
sure he never has been wed."

Here Hahkon laughed, and gaily said, "Lord
Hubba, I never have had time to think of such a
thing. My life has been full busy, both on land and
wave, and Brenda, my dear foster-mother, takes the
cares in hand of my poor Tredalund."

"Thou hast no bride ?" said Ingvar.

"I ?" said Hahkon. "No."

"Well, then," said Hubba, "this I say to thee. I
never dreamt to offer Ragnar's daughter to a man.
She should be asked of me, her eldest brother, in her
father's stead. But if thou art not too young, I give
thee Thordisa to wife, daughter of Ragnar Lodbrok.
What, man, yea or nay ?"

"It is too much, Yarl Hubba. The maid knows
not my name."

"There hast thou erred," quoth Ingvar. "She has
heard of thee, and of thy exploit in the Wendel Sea,
when thou didst ravage Luna."

"Then it *was* Luna, and not Rome, I sacked.
I shame me for the error ; but I was certain at the

time of that affair, some seven winters back, that I had crushed great Rome!"

This was greatly applauded, and some of the Danes laughed, but their mirth was checked by a look from Hubba, who turned to Hahkon, saying with a smile, "How many winters hast thou?"

"Some twenty-five or six. I have not been so careful as I should have been in counting. Brenda knows."

"Good," said Yarl Hubba. "Thordisa is just seventeen. A golden girl, Yarl Hahkon. All pure metal. Golden heart, golden locks; rich, too, in the burnished gold won by our hero-father. The very bride for thee, and I am glad to give the hero's daughter to one so brave as thou."

Hahkon, as he truly said, had always been too busy in his stormy viking life, especially during the last eventful seven years and more, to think of taking to himself the crown of manhood, a wife. When men spoke of this to him he used to laugh and say that he had hardly reached the state of Tyr or Tis, the youthful warrior phase of a bold champion's life. He had not earned the right to think of maiden's smiles with greater interest than of a thousand other lovely things in nature. He had not shown himself the bravest of the brave, and never thought of love.

For it was a maxim in the North that men should never marry young. Women looked down on youthful suitors with feelings of contempt. They scorned the untried warrior, and the way to gain their good opinion lay through battles, blows, and blood! Now, Hahkon's well-known valour, high renown, high birth, and well-filled coffers, made him much talked of all through Scandinavia, and many a haughty chieftain would have gladly seen Hahkon his son-in-law.

Yarl Grimm looked very grim indeed, when he perceived the feeling produced by Hubba's speech, and grimmer still he looked when, with a frankness peculiar to our hero, he grasped Yarl Hubba's hand, saying, as he did so, "Topp, my lord [equivalent to *agreed*, my hand, upon it; it's a bargain]. But I make one condition. There must be no force. I know nought of women save that they are good and kind, and mostly very gentle. I would not that a woman suffered force through me, beyond the ordinary discipline of war, when she is in the camp. So let the maid see me, and if she like me not, no harm is done, the bargain shall be ended. I will have no wife forced upon me; a wife against her will turns life to death, and love to hate. I'll none of it. But if I suit her liking, Topp, as I said before."

This the brothers thought right and noble, and the result was that a grand banquet was given on shore, where the golden maiden with the golden locks saw Hahkon the Sea-Eagle, and poured him out the golden mead into a gold-bound horn.

The next day Hubba told her that Hahkon had joined the cause, and was a mighty aid in crushing England, and to bind him further to their cause a marriage was proposed between the young Sea-Eagle and Ragnar Lodbrok's daughter, with whom the choice now lay to take him as a husband or to reject him. She was free to choose.

The maiden asked a day to think it over, at the end of which her answer was favourable.

Hahkon and Orm were talking of their ships, when Hubba and Ingvar entered. They were so deeply plunged in grave considerations they did not

heed the first part of the speech announcing the good news. Hubba spoke thus:

"Friend Hahkon, all is well. Thordisa is thy bride, but as we sail so soon there is short time for ceremony. What wilt thou give her? What wilt thou do with her?"

"A fresh coat of paint I'll give her to the waist, and what I'll do besides, is this: regild her stem and bows and stern. There will be time for that!"

Hubba flushed red with rage, but Ingvar laughed. "He thinks more of his war-ship than his bride," he said. "Hubba is speaking not of ships, but of thy bride Thordisa!"

"I did not know," said Hahkon, simply. "I thought he meant 'Ellida.'"

After some merriment the wedding feast was held. The ceremony was most simple, consisting of exchange of presents only. Instead of Thordisa being carried in state to her bridegroom's house by his friends (as was the custom), accompanied by her father, she was rowed by Orm, Sigurd, Biorn, Svend, and two more of Hahkon's "captains," assisted by Hubba and Ingvar, in a boat to "Ellida," on board of which good dragon, in the gangway, stood Hahkon, fully armed, to meet her. The side-ropes with the rattlins forming a ladder were thrown over the side, and the way in which the sea bride sprang up this slender stair would have won the heart of a sailor in any period of history. The ladder was drawn up after her, and a rope was flung over for the men, who came bounding on board, their arms and armour forming the best of bridal pageants and the best of bridal music that could well be imagined.

Aft was the high bank, where two chairs were

placed, on which carpets and tapestry were strewn. The Danish Raven and the young Sea-Eagle, both worked in black upon a blood-red ground, floated as flags behind the throne-like chairs.

The mystic gifts were these : Hahkon presented to his fair-haired bride a horse, a plough, twelve oxen, a lance, and a shield, together with a golden vase of earth from Tredalund. These signified, first, that the wife was not an idle appendage to the bridegroom's state, but a real help-mate in the time of need, bound to his cause with heart and hand, ready to ride with him to death or victory. This was the meaning of the horse and arms. The plough and oxen showed that she should be the head of all domestic matters, whether of the field or house. The earth in the golden vase conveyed to her the land at Tredalund, while costly bracelets and a finger-ring of gold bound her to him for ever.

On her part, she presented Hahkon with a golden helm, denoting his yarl's rank. The eagle-wings, instead of being plucked from any bird, were bravely wrought in silver. Such a thing had never been seen before, and Hahkon of the silver wings became the bridegroom's name. A shirt of mail or hauberk made of rings, the edge rings all of gold, was the next noble gift. A shield bound round with gold and with a golden cup-like centre was the next, showing that the new-wedded man was helm and shield and lance.

Hahkon and Thordisa sat on the dainty daïs, when two gold-mounted horns filled with pure Roman wine were handed them by Hubba and his brother Ingvar, then they solemnly drank each other's health and vowed their mutual faith. Then the gods' healths were drunk, then those of all their friends, lastly a

libation to the sea was made, and what was in the horns was poured out free to Rana, goddess of the deep.

Orm and Sigurd now approached, bearing a gold-bound shield. On this the bride was placed, and mounted on the shoulders of these brave men was borne around the ship, the other champions clashing with their swords approval of the viking's bride. But before these men there walked twelve maidens, each with a lighted taper, chanting the nuptial song.

The plough and oxen, horse, and vase of earth, were lowered to the boat and borne ashore ; the maidens with their tapers lined the ship, the anchor soon was weighed, the sail was sheeted home, and then Thordisa took the helm and steered the noble ship a mile or so from shore, till at the command of Hahkon, now her lord, she yielded it to him ; the meaning being, that though able to steer the ship and guide the house, she gave command to him.

At this the applause of the shields grew deafening, the maidens threw their lighted candles into the waves, and the marriage rites were ended.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW HAHKON AND THE SONS OF RAGNAR LODBROK
CAME TO ENGLAND, AND WHO FOLLOWED THEM.

THERE was joy and merriment and feasting on board the Danish ships. Mead and mirth were the order of the day. The sun was shining on the English coast when first they came in sight. It was a grand, a glorious sight. The sunbeams (called arrows by the Danes and us) were proudly flung back again from the burnished breasts of the daring Danes, on board those bonny barks. In warlike wantonness the banners waved, the warriors' shields shone in the golden sheen, and the heads and bows of the haughty dragons breasted the waves in gold.

Was there no war-ship sent to ward the shore from ruthless rover and from viking rage? Was there not one upon this land of ours who cared to warn the champions of the coming woe? Alas, there was none! Civil war was devastating the land. Osbert, who four years ago had been expelled by Ella from the throne of Northumbria, which he himself had usurped, just at this juncture found himself strong enough to attempt the overthrow of his rival.

By the advice of Hahkon the landing was effected in East Anglia, whose king, Edmund, was not the man to offer much resistance. His plan was then to march across the portion of the Mercian land lying between East Anglia and Northumberland, and so gain all these lands.

The greatest force the winds had ever wafted to these shores from Denmark now disembarked in that part of East Anglia which we now call Yarmouth. Here they coolly left the ships, and commenced taking possession of the country. The vast gathering can hardly be conceived that was poured forth from those mighty vessels ; and when all the troops were on land they proceeded to a large plain, where the first inspection was held. The march thither was performed, as usual, to the sound of their own rough voices, time being beaten by the clash of the sword against the buckler. Something of the bloodthirsty determination of these dreadful foes may be gathered from the following song, to which they marched :

“ Hurrah ! we are Danes from Denmark's shore,
Norsemen, Swedes, and Danes !
Who lances of living lightning bore
From our mighty pine-clad plains.
The thunder sleeps in our sounding shield,
Fettered lightning the right hand sways !
Foe quellers in fight upon flood or field,
Wherever the wild wind strays.

“ Hurrah ! to avenge the rover slain
March Lodbrok's men in mail !
They bring with them blades that shall strew the plain
With the dead hewn thick as hail.
The eagles shall eat out the English eyes
Their rivers shall all run red !
‘ Revenge ! ’ the ruthless raven cries
As he feasts on the fallen dead !

“ Hurrah ! beat blade upon buckler broad,
Clash ! champions clad in chain !
A harvest sweet we sow with the sword,
That shall serve as sickle again !

A kingly clang is a viking's tread !
March on midst the deafening din ;
The vultures, hovering overhead,
Watch the prize we war to win ! "

They reached the plain they sought without the slightest opposition from the men of East Anglia, which proved how accurate Hahkon's calculations had been. At the farther extremity of the plain was a dense forest, on which the Danes marched, first halting for the mid-day meal on the plain. This concluded, they renewed their march and reached the forest, which they coolly commenced cutting down. Of course, such experienced warriors would not work unguardedly; so that, while large bodies of men were told off to fell timber, others in compact "wedges" were posted in various positions where they could be of service in repelling attacks, and holding any foes in check until their comrades in the wood could join them, and form an irresistible army.

And was all this quietly permitted by the English? It was; for each English king thought that the Danish host had come to smite some other, which would be to the advantage of the first. So the Danes landed without the least resistance on the English side; nay, worse than that, Hahkon went to a town not far from where the modern Norwich stands, where Edmund lived in peace. Hahkon walked with Orm and Sigurd and about twenty champions on foot into the town, straight to the royal dwelling.

"What seek ye in such numbers on my coast?" demanded this strange king.

"We seek the two kings Osbert the fair and Ella of Northumberland, on whom we have vowed

vengeance for the foul murder done on Ragnar Lodbrok. Knowest thou them?"

"Ay, that I do full well; but I must tell you, knights or earls, or what your style may be, that ye are much in error; this is not Osbert's land."

"Nor Ella's either, if we come to that," quoth Hahkon, laughing. "No, no. I know it is not; but then the march is easier from this place than from the Northumbrian coast; and then thou wilt assist us, and therefore are we come."

"How can I aid you?" said the patient king. "Tell me, I beg you, what can *I* do to help?"

"We want some thousand horses."

"They are yours," said Edmund, interrupting. "When must ye have them?"

"Not before the spring."

"Holy St. Margaret! Shall ye winter here?"

"Ay, truly," answered Hahkon; "and, beside the horses, our people and our women must be fed. This shall be thy light charge. It is an easy task for thee to find us beef and bread."

"Easy it will not be," said Edmund; "for such a swarm of warriors will breed a famine in the land, but if they waste Northumberland, it may yet be a bargain. I consent to feed your army a whole winter through, so that ye march in spring against Northumberland. But will ye really, truly, leave in spring, and war against Northumberland?"

"Yes, I swear," said Hahkon.

"But," said King Edmund, "ye are pagan Danes, how can ye swear?"

"I swear upon my bracelets."

"Yes. I have heard that Danes and Norsemen hold to such an oath. Well, I will help you. Take

now six and forty horses ; to-morrow ye shall have the woodwrights and the smiths."

And thus the timid king, awed by the daring Danes, assisted in the downfall of his land.

The huts built by the Danish soldiers were similar in form to the cottages we have described when speaking of Brenda's cottage at Framness, and a description of the huts of the Russian peasants of the present day would almost apply to those now constructed in England by the orders of Ingvar, who had been elected to the chief command.

The strange and weak conduct of Edmund contributed in a very great degree to the success of the invaders. They, impelled by what the Odinic creed regarded as a sacred duty, revenge, acted with most deliberate coolness. Hubba, a brave, but supernaturally fierce warrior, had wished to commence the work of devastation by the destruction of all the towns in East Anglia, but the wiser councils of Ingvar had prevailed. He had pointed out how these East Anglian people might be made allies in the grand work of destruction to be accomplished in Northumbria. There was the true cause of quarrel, there Ella and Osbert were still contending. This Ella was the same who had thrown Ragnar Lodbrok into the prison, where he was made to die a cruel death, by the bites of snakes, and on his head should the vengeance of Lodbrok's children fall. So that revenge was sure, Ingvar urged, they could afford to let it be slow.

Few individuals have exercised such a powerful influence on history as this Ragnar, who in descending upon the Northumbrian coast, as we have mentioned in a former chapter, was, according to the peculiar notions

of the period, not performing any illegal or extraordinary action in the little piratical escapade, which brought such serious consequences with it. Had he been slain in battle, or beheaded with the sword, there would have been no complaint against the victorious Northumbrians, because they would only have sent the viking soul to Valhalla, the very place it sought to enter. But by the foul death to which he was condemned, the spirit of the champion was doomed to the dreary regions of Hela, under the dominion of that pale goddess of the dead.

Death of the body was a matter of supreme indifference to the Scandinavians. Death of the soul they feared beyond all conception, and according to their creed death by torture was a cause of exclusion from the joys of Valhalla, therefore, in their revenge for the punishment inflicted upon Ragnar, the Danes thought it only just and right to employ similar punishment on the English who had destroyed the famous hero of the North, the most celebrated in all their annals. But here they were baffled. What amount of torture, what amount of death and devastation could be an equivalent for the wrong done? The English were Christians, therefore Valhalla was closed to them. To send them in shoals to Hela would hardly atone for the loss to Odin of such a champion as Ragnar. What was to be done?

This question was debated in the first Ting that was assembled, a few days after the march to the heath, and after some shelter had been provided for the women.

In this meeting the fierce Hubba had expressed his idea that immediate action should be taken, and that Edmund's burg and town should fall at once;

and his address had been received with great applause. Then came the wiser plan of his brother, which showed how much would be gained by waiting where they were until all the promised aids from the North came in. "While we wait here a winter," he said, "our force grows like the snow in a northern valley, where every fresh fall increases the mass; the same snow, falling on contending billows, vanishes, but weakens their rage. The Northumbrians are our foes; for the present the East Angles are our allies. If we destroy them we weaken our force for the war with Northumbria. We must be friends with them until we have desolated Northumbria, then we can fall upon them also, and England is our own. As they slew the Britons we will slay them, as they tortured Ragnar we will torture them. We will leave neither man, woman, nor child of the Angles alive. England shall be a new Denmark. The altars of Christ, and their other gods, Paul, Peter, Mark, and John shall be hurled down, and the faith of Odin shall prevail! But mercy? Oh, no! let the word from this day forth be forgotten in English."

The enthusiasm with which this speech was received induced Hubba to resign the supreme command, to which Ingvar was then immediately and unanimously elected.

Soon the houses were all built, and due precautions taken against the cold. Grand sheds were raised for public meetings, where the future war could be debated. The fidelity of Edmund was shown by the ready supplies of food sent into the winter quarters of the vikings, the first ever constructed by the Scandinavians, who had hitherto always returned to winter in the North.

A large hut was constructed for Hahkon and Thordisa next to the grand dwelling of Ingvar and Hubba, who always remained friends, notwithstanding the scene on the Ting. A square was built round these two houses, each side of which was formed by the dwellings of two kings. Behind these houses came the dwellings of the yarls, ranged in a ring all round, so none could boast of any favour shown above the rest. Another ring of very wide extent was formed by the houses of the wealthy freeholders and other proprietors, while on the outskirts were the abodes of the poorer members of the community.

There were regular streets radiating from the dwellings of the commanders, which formed the centre of this military town. Where these streets intersected the circles, squares were formed, in the centre of each of which stood a building arranged for the reception and comfort of the priestesses and other women, who followed the fortunes of the heroes, either as leeches, valas, or cup-bearers. These were presided over by matrons, whose age and dignity gave them authority in the eyes of the more youthful members of the female train.

The winter was a severe one, which was a favourable circumstance for the Danes, who would have been killed off in vast numbers had they experienced a regular English wet and foggy season. The snow lay thick, and the men had plenty of work in shovelling it away from the streets and squares. They enjoyed it, and soon constructed sledges, to which the horses were harnessed, and taught to skim along the surface of the snow. Besides these out-of-doors amusements, there was plenty of the old Northern drinking, verse-making, and reciting. The world-

famed lay made by Ragnar Lodbrok at the time of his death was, of course, in the mouth of every skald, and the clashing burden, "We hewed with our swords," resounded through the Danish town.

When the spring came on, the warriors waited to see what reinforcements they were likely to have from home, and then they had to allow for the breaking up of the ice in the north, and consequent later spring. This, however, gave time and opportunity for the practice of those warlike exercises which made the Scandinavian warriors renowned.

The warriors of this immense host, composed of men from all parts of Scandinavia, had become better acquainted during their sojourn under roofs, and Ingvar had deputed to his brother Hubba the task of drilling them so as to act in concert, and the whole vast assembly was as easily handled as a modern regiment by a skilful colonel.

That none should be miscounted by the rest, Hahkon had mounted all the host ! Edmund was almost crazy. The drain upon his means was fearful. He sent into the country of the Western Saxons for aid in cattle, and Ethelred had sent him vast supplies of horses and of oxen for the Danes, thinking with Edmund that to aid their arms would be to gain their love. Their love ! They little knew the Danes ! Burrhed, the king of Mercia, refused to lend them aid. But they contrived to mount their force without it, and such a host of horsemen has not been known in history.

The time passed on, till on the feast of Eostra [Easter], a grand fleet came in sight of the outlying dragons, placed by Hahkon's care along the Northumbrian coast. The bird of Odin on the blood-red flag

Showed they were viking barks. Orm, in his "Fenrir," was the first to mark these ships on the horizon. He signalled to the other vessels forming the line of guardships to join and sail up with him to the strangers.

Who can paint Orm's delight to find them a fleet coming to their aid commanded by King Halfdan? He sailed to meet his dragon ship, and flew like a sea-bird over the waves to greet him. "What, ho! What ship is that?"

"Shiedbladnir,' from Framness."

"Thought so. Is Halfdan there on board?"

"On board he is."

"Hurrah! And Yalmar?"

"Ay, ay. On board."

"Hurrah! Just come in time. I'll board thee in a moment. Never mind a boat. Throw a rope overboard, and just heave to."

"Ay, ay. There goes the rope; look out."

And the intrepid viking plunged into the waves, and swam to Halfdan's ship. He gained the rope, the other end of which was fastened to a "pin," as it is called, on board. Hand over hand he climbed the rope, and mounted the ship's side.

Upon the quarter-deck Halfdan the Merry stood, enjoying much this feat. "Welcome, friend Orm! I owe thee one for that. Tell me thy news," he cried.

"Wonderful news! Unheard of tidings, King! Bethink thee! The pudding-headed rascals lend us aid to take their country from them. True, by Thor! They give us food and wood and horses for the fleet. I think if we had wanted arms and clothing they had found us them."

"Now, Orm, do not provoke me ; tell the truth."

"I tell thee nothing but the truth. We have a splendid town, which they have helped to build ; each man is mounted on a noble steed, and all our troops are well and very merry !"

"Wonderful tidings, wonderful people, too. Hahkon was right in every word he told us. And what of Hahkon. Is the youngster well ?"

"Still stranger news of him. Guess what hath chanced !"

"Nay, that I cannot ; so say out thy say. Ease off the weather brace a bit. You there ! Belay ! Now tell me about Hahkon. The sheet haul still more taut. Oh, well ; that's well. Belay ! Now about Hahkon. I am very anxious. How badly those fellows pull. I shame me that the English loons should see it. That was a lady's pull. By Freya, it's too bad ! Never mind me, go on about Yarl Hahkon. Come, now, that's better pulled, like men."

"Canst thou not guess, King Halfdan, what has happened ? I scarce can break it to thee !"

For a moment, the good king forgot ship and oars, sail, and tacks, and sheets, and everything but Hahkon. He let the tiller nearly leave his grasp, whereby he almost got his sail aback !

"Thou soon wilt have us all aback with this strange manner, Orm. I hope he is not dead !"

"No ; worse than that, King Halfdan !"

"Odin and Thor ! What can the fellow mean ?"

"The poor young yarl is wed !"

It is impossible to paint the surprise, consternation, dismay, and wrath, which were all at one and the same moment depicted in Halfdan's face, when this strange tale was told.

"Wed? Here, some one take the tiller. I shall foul some ship, or run my own aground. Thanks, good Yarl Biornstiern. Keep her as she goes. Now tell me about Hahkon."

Orm now related the story of the match so suddenly proposed with Ragnar's daughter. At each succeeding sentence Halfdan's wonder grew till he could hold no longer.

"And what of Grimm's young kinswoman?"

"Grimm's kinswoman, King! I never heard of her!"

"Odd!" said King Halfdan, "very odd, indeed. I tell thee, Orm, I like it not."

"What have I said to anger thee?"

"Thou hast said nothing; it must lie with Hahkon. We shall meet anon. Where do we anchor?"

"Down below the head thou seest from the starboard bow."

"Take thou the helm. Yarl Biornstiern, be good enough to let my young friend steer."

The merry phase had passed from Halfdan's mood; he paced the deck with fierce and hurried strides. There was some "sea" on, which made the dragon roll, rendering the rowers' work a useless toil. The wind was fair, and on the back-board quarter (now called *port*). But Halfdan never bade the warriors cease to row. His heart was full of Hahkon. At last the champions laughed, because each curling wave caught the oars' blades, however skilfully the warriors feathered. This roused King Halfdan from his gloomy dream.

"Lay in the oars," he cried. As quick as thought the huge sweeps lay resting upon the crutch. The

men stood at their stations, wondering much to see their king so moody, but he never spoke until the entrance to the Yare was gained, where all the Danish dragons lay off Yarmouth. The Danes had gone ashore at this point rather than venture up the river (as they subsequently did), because they would not risk attack from foes in force on both sides of a river.

Halfdan's dragon headed the host of sea warriors borne in sixty ships, after which came what we should now call "tenders," carrying stores and horses, and when he reached Yarmouth, the whole Danish force was drawn up to receive him, for the ship in which Orm had sailed had gone on in advance, and being lighter and drawing much less water, had arrived long before Halfdan's dragon came in sight, and thus the news was spread.

Great were the rejoicings at the accession of so large a force. The clang of shields beaten by sounding swords showed the delight of brave men in their comrades. The Swedish warriors, as each boat-load reached the shore, were greeted with hurrahs that rent the air, and when all were landed, such a shout went up as Scandinavian lungs alone could utter. The Swedes marched in splendid array singing the following :

To conquest and to glory
The grim King Halfdan leads
His champions, known in story,
Thor's chosen sons, the Swedes.

The Raven flutters o'er us,
Where haughty Halfdan leads ;
All foes who stand before us
Fall 'neath the swords of Swedes.

Eight kings are met for battle,
But lordly Halfdan leads
To the front, midst Thor's grim rattle,
A kingly host of Swedes.

With chain-mail pansar * ringing,
We march where Halfdan leads,
Our fathers' glory singing,
The deathless deeds of Swedes.

Revenge we vow on Ella,
To vengeance Halfdan leads,
And Ragnar's foes to Hela †
Shall sink 'neath swords of Swedes !

The haughty self-assertion of this modest lay did not arouse any unpleasant feelings of resentment in the minds of the other Scandinavians, who did the same thing in their turn at every opportunity. There was some reason for their self-glorification, for in the whole army there was not so well-disciplined or so neat-looking a body of men.

Hubba and Ingvar in mail met Halfdan as he marched at the head of his splendid army, as it passed through the lines of the Danes drawn up to receive them, and forming a lane through which they marched. The Danes were not in armour, but wore their thick red tunic or *roc*, the cap with the blood-red comb, or the helmet with eagle's wings. The inferior warriors bore their shields, and were armed with the fearful Danish battle-axe. All wore swords. The yarls and nobles wore their gold-bound helms with eagle's wings displayed ; of these most carried lances. The lines on either side the Swedish host were almost columns, and as the Swedes in glittering chain-mail armour, shining helms, and flashing arms moved on between them, they

* Chain-mail armour.

† Goddess of Nastrand, the region of the dead who were not sent to Odin.

seemed a silver stream dancing between its rugged banks of rocks.

The sons of Lodbrok, accompanied by eight proud Northern kings and many chosen champions and yarls, came forward to meet Halfdan. Foremost among the yarls strode Hahkon in his helm with silver wings, and he was greatly puzzled at Halfdan's chilly greeting. For the king hardly noticed him, and when the greetings of the rest were made, Ingvar observed,

"One of thy yarls has joined our cause more closely than we had any right to contemplate——"

"Oh, yes, I know; Yarl Hahkon, Attlé's son, dwelling at Tredalund. Yes, I have heard." And then without a word to Hahkon he went on. "Is yonder stalwart warrior Skogenbiorn? It seems but yesterday that he rode upon my lance-shaft for a horse! Ah, well! That's twenty years ago. Yarl Skogenbiorn, wear this in memory of me."

So with the other yarls. For each he had a kind or merry word, but not a look for Hahkon. He passed on, and entered the grand hall, raised for the sons of Lodbrok. The daïs, or high bank, had twelve seats prepared, two for the leaders of the host, Hubba and Ingvar, eight for the Northern kings, one more for Halfdan, and a vacant chair was left without an owner. To this the brothers pointing, Ingvar said: "We pray thee, King, to name some favoured yarl to join thee and the other kings here present. We leave the task to thee to choose thy worthiest yarl!"

"My thanks are due for this great courtesy," said Halfdan, with his very kindest smile. "It is a task of no small labour, ye may guess, among my warrior yarls to choose the best. They are all good and

true, the bucklers of their country steel bound round with gold ! I cannot choose the bravest, for all my Swedes are brave, but I may name the *dearest*, the nearest to my heart, because of certain passages in our warlike lives which bind us much together ; and that is good Yarl Yalmar, my second in command."

The brothers looked confounded. But what was to be done ? The choice was left to Halfdan, who freely named his man. Yalmar was duly seated among the Northern kings, while Hahkon, like a stranger, was passed unnoticed by.

Enraged at Halfdan's manner, Hahkon left the hall, and stalked in high displeasure to his own home, hard by. But just as he was entering he heard a well-known voice cry, "Hahkon, come here ! I want thee ! Come hither, man, to me !" He turned, and saw his brother Orm waving his hand excitedly on high. So Hahkon turned to meet him.

"What !" he exclaimed in wrath, "canst thou explain this treatment ? Tell me what means the king ? thou wert the first to see him, and the last. What hast thou said against me ? By the hammer o' Thor, I swear——"

"Do nothing of the kind, my friend ; I know the whole vile scheme. Another trick of that pale nithing Grimm, whom, when I meet, I'll flout before the king, despite his belt and yardom. Nithing and cur ! "

"Orm, I have known thee time since we were shepherd lads, keeping the sheep for Brenda. In all that time thou hast not lied, nor done the least mean deed ; but if it be, as I suspect, that *thou* hast wronged me when away, and poisoned Halfdan's ear, I swear by all the gods——"

"Do nothing of the kind until thou hearest all I have to say. I never said a word of thee in all my life, except in praise. I am no back-biter, and think it bitter shame to hear thee taunt me thus. To any other man than thou, my sword had been my answer. But we have sworn upon the sword never to quarrel."

"Well ! say thy say ; what is it ?"

"I told King Halfdan thou wast wedded."

"Ha ! and what of that ?"

"It seems that Grimm has told him, or some one of Grimm's house has told him, thou wert betrothed to a young maiden, daughter or granddaughter to that yarl."

"It is not possible ; I never saw the girl save on the day on which Yarl Grimm came last to Tredalund. There were two women with him, come, as he said, to thank me for my gifts, which freed them from their debts ! I would not speak to them. Who likes such sickening thanks ? Not I ! I sent a man with them to Brenda, and never saw them since, upon my Northern honour !"

It was a foul offence amongst the Scandinavians for a man to give a woman an idea he meant to marry her, and then to throw her over. He could be prosecuted and punished by the law ; and in some cases banished. Among such duellists a case of this kind would be often met by an appeal to arms ; and the two friends, after mature reflection, agreed to challenge Grimm.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW HAHKON CHALLENGED YARL GRIMM.

IN the “good old times” of which we write human life was cheap, and “Northern honour” dear. It is a strange circumstance, but one illustrating the intimate connection between thought and language, that as the keen sense of the all-important sanctity of this abstract sentiment died out, so the word for it became extinct, and we have been forced to borrow (or steal) one from the very race which we have least cause to love, the Romans! Our own word *ar* or *aer* is dead, and we use honour!

Now a yarl, in whose very title the same root *ar* is seen, was more than any bound to be sensitive upon this point. He *could* not overlook an insult, to do so was a social death; and so to make it utterly impossible for Grimm to back out from the quarrel that Hahkon fixed on him, it was determined by the foster brothers to “plant the nithing post.”

A whole day was consumed in preparation for this strange ceremony, and long before day-break the following morning, there appeared a huge pole or mast set up in the centre square of the Danish town. On the top of this was a horse’s head, the nose pointing in the direction of the house in which Yarl Grimm was lodged. On this post a board was nailed, with this inscription in runes, or Northern letters: “I, Hahkon Attléson, Yarl of Tredalund,

known as the 'Sea Eagle,' also as 'Lord of the Silver Pinions,' set up this post against Grimm, Yarl of Barnangen, declaring him to be a nithing, a false and lying knave, whom I dare to holmgang [duel] with sword, with double axe, and knife."

Such was the custom in those old days of yore, and in it we trace the origin of *posting* a man a coward.

The mast was fixed, the board prepared, and all in order long before dawn. The first to see the horse's head was Ingvar, who in great indignation went back into the house to his brother Hubba.

"Look here!" he cried, "these Swedes are quarrelling already! If this thing goes on, there will be nothing else but duels in the host. I take it as an evil omen, Hubba, that on the very day this Swedish king arrives there should be strife amongst us. More than that, Hahkon is kin to us by marriage, and, as I think, should have appealed to me."

"Nay, brother, thou art wrong, out in this matter quite. I take it as an omen of hard blows and doughty deeds beginning with our valiant brother Hahkon. I say, too, that although so young, the boy has sense and knowledge far beyond his years. He is quite able to judge his own affairs, and if appeal to any one were made, it should be to King Halfdan, not to us."

"There I do not agree. Hahkon brought us his sword long before Halfdan sailed," said Ingvar. "But gently, brother! Let us not squabble over points of honour between these Swedish fools; take we the case to Halfdan. He, a Swedish king, moreover, Hahkon's master, shall judge what should be done."

This was resolved on, and the two fierce brothers

entered the house now occupied by Halfdan, which had been built for them, they contenting themselves with a smaller structure, built off the grand meeting hall for the reception of heralds, who, even at that early period, were invariably treated with respect and distinction.

"How now, my masters!" cried Halfdan the Merry, as the two fierce brothers stormed into the house. "What lack ye? Is your town on fire? I hold it a dangerous practice to live in towns; one is never safe. Come to the high bank, yarls. Now tell your tale."

"Thou knowest, King," said Ingvar, as he took his seat, "that thy most cherished champion, Hahkon, is wedded to Thordisa, daughter of Ragnar Lodbrok."

"That I have heard," said Halfdan gloomily. "Say on."

The brothers noted how the king's brow grew stern, and Hubba cried, with fierce impetuosity, "It seems to me, lord King, that this same wedding is not to thy taste. Hast thou objections to our sister as wife to yarl of thine?"

"I have objections, but none against thy sister. I only fear the honour is too great for such a man as Hahkon!"

"How is that? Is he not Hahkon Attléson? Was not the dreaded Sea-Wolf Hahkon's father?"

"All that is true enough; but I have heard from Freydisa, my wife, Lady of Framness and that coast, that a young maiden now with her in bower claims Hahkon's promise as betrothed bride!"

"The nithing! May we now ask the name of this young maiden?"

"I do not rightly know; but she is granddaughter

to Grimm, the yarl of Barnangen, belonging to my band, and serving in thy war."

"But, good sir King," said Hubba, waxing wroth, "this Grimm, too, joined us in Yarl Hahkon's train, was present at the wedding ; he knew our wish, and never said a word that Hahkon was betrothed. If that had been the case, he, as the maiden's kinsman, owed it to us and her, as well as to our sister, to make it known to us ; but as he held his tongue, I think there is nothing in it."

"Yarl!" exclaimed Halfdan, "Sweden's kings are never liars ; true, I had not the tale from the girl's proper lips, but there is a circumstance for which I never could account ; and if he were betrothed or promised to the maiden I then could understand it. Therefore I have believed the rumour."

"King Halfdan," said Yarl Ingvar, "there is much of good or evil for our host as this is true or false. It would be very evil if our champions thought a nithing wed our sister. It will be very good if this be all cleared up. Tell us those things which made thee doubt thy yarl and take this accusation for the truth."

"Willingly, yarls," said Halfdan. And he told them the whole tale of how Yarl Grimm with Thorkell had tried to injure Hahkon, to rob him of his birth, his name, and dwelling ; and yet, Grimm owing large sums of money, Hahkon paid off the debts, set the old nithing free, forgave him his foul deeds, and made a friend of him. "I could not understand it," said the king, "until it flashed across me as Freydisa told me of the maiden's speech, and that explained the whole. The next thing that I hear is that he wed your sister, yarls ! That seemed a nithing deed ! "

"The thing is very strange; I like it not," said Hubba.

"Nor I," said Ingvar. "Let the king decide whether this fight shall be, or not."

"Well, then," quoth Halfdan, "in the name of Thor, let it be tried by battle; only both yarls should come before us first and let us know their cause."

No sooner was this step agreed on than messengers were sent to Hahkon, demanding his presence in the hall. Men were despatched to Grimm requesting his appearance in the same place.

It happened that the two arrived together, but Hahkon strode in foremost to the hall, wearing his tunic, crested cap, and sword, but otherwise unarmed. He took no note of Grimm, who stepped in after him, making no noble show, as might have been expected from so tried a chief.

When Hahkon had approached the raised high seat where the three chiefs were sitting, he stood upright before them. He never bent the knee, nor made the slightest sign of more respect than he would show to hostile lords, into whose hands he might have fallen.

"We sent for thee, Yarl Hahkon," said the king, "to know on what pretence thou hast set up a nithing post against thy friend, Yarl Grimm?"

"Because he is a nithing, as he knows!"

"What answer dost thou make, Yarl Grimm?"

"I say that I would rather fight you three than Hahkon single-handed. I injured him most deeply, but he forgave the wrong; he paid my debts, he loaded me with favour, saved my honour and my life, and more than that, he saved my daughter and her

child from slavery. He now revokes his word, and calls me to account ; and I am here ! ”

“ What dost thou say to this, Yarl Hahkon ? ”

“ That I am not so mean as to revoke my word. The score that I forgave remains forgiven. The matter now between us is fresh, and foully false.”

Here Hahkon was interrupted by the entrance of a train of females clad in white ; the foremost was Thordisa, his young wife, sister to Ingvar.

“ Brothers, and King,” she cried, “ have I your leave to speak ? ”

“ Say on, fair lady,” quoth the merry king ; “ but mount the high bank and sit near to us.”

Accordingly, Thordisa ascended the daïs, and spoke as follows :

“ Ingvar and Hubba, brothers mine, ye wooed me for that yarl. I took him for my husband, and now I cast him off ! He calls Yarl Grimm a nithing by his post, now let him prove it ! What Yarl Grimm did formerly against him he forgave ; if he forgave he has no right to punish ; forgiveness wipes the sin away for ever. But there is other cause ! That traitor, Hahkon, loved Grimm’s daughter’s child, and promised her to wed her. With that promise on his lips, no wonder he could be so generous to me, and give me *time* to like him ! He found that he might wed great Ragnar Lodbrok’s daughter, and threw Grimm’s grandchild over ! Nithing ! I claim the battle. And may the holy gods defend the right ! ”

“ What sayest thou, Yarl Hahkon, to this charge ? ” said Halfdan sternly.

“ I say it is unfounded, and a nithing charge, as Grimm will not deny. I never saw his granddaughter but once, and then I bade a servant lead her and

her mother straight to my foster-mother. I never saw the maid before, and never saw her since. As to the promise, all I said to her was, Brenda should serve her needs, and while she was in bower she should lack nought. That was my promise, neither more nor less."

"Falsehoods!" exclaimed Thordisa.

"Gently, sister mine, if that the blood of Ragnar can be gentle! What sayest thou, Yarl Grimm?"

"I say that Hahkon speaks the truth. He never saw my granddaughter but in the way he says."

"This is most strange," quoth Halfdan. "It may be the maid, Grimm's grandchild Heckla, dreamed of all this nonsense, as maidens will; but still it likes me not. What, yarls?"

"We think it quite beyond our might, lord King, to judge this knotty point. We therefore deem it best and the most fitting to leave it to the gods. Such is our sister's will, and so we charge these yarls, the elder and the youth to meet in duel, but with witnesses; and I propose that all the kings and yarls commanding in the host should without fail be present."

This was agreed to. Hahkon left the hall without the trace of any courteous sign as recognising Halfdan's rank or the two chieftains' power. He strode away, as he had entered in, haughty and silent, proud and cold.

He turned to Orm, who was waiting outside for him. "Ha! brother Orm," he cried, "so much for Christian tricks! I told thee I would try their precepts on this Grimm, and therefore I forgave him; and now, see my reward!"

"I think Grimm is not guilty," said Orm; "how

can he be? He left the bay with us and never saw his kinswomen after we had set sail. What time had he to prime them with this tale? Unless, perhaps——”

“What now, my friend? speak up, what dost thou think of it?”

“He may have taught them there at home in Barnangen out there, and just have brought them to thy house to make the thing complete.”

“Hum! It may be so, but still we have no proof. I care not how it ends. One thing I ask thee, for since my gentle wife has claimed the rights of war, I care not to remain in yonder house with her. I pray thee, therefore, give me shelter, Orm. I'll bring my arms and armour to thy hut. Of course thou art my second, and we shall see what yarl will back old Grimm!”

The two friends went together to the house, where Hahkon told his serving men to gather his arms and armour in a group, to saddle his best steed and lead him off to Orm.

While men were busy doing his behests, the Lady Thordisa with all her train returned, and seeing horses laden with Hahkon's arms and armour, inquired for what cause he left her at a time when, just before a conflict, he should be at home.

“Most gentle Dane,” he answered, “at thy wish did I become thy husband, at thy wish expressed to-day in hall, I leave thee. I have been tender, gentle, kind, but at the first breath of a charge against me thou hast employed thy right as Scandinavian matron to discard me. Thy wedding gift to me I now return, and call on Orm to witness that I revoke my gift of Tredalund to thee after my death. Ha! Yarl

Hagen, pray come in. We want a witness that I have revoked my gift of Tredalund after my death to Ragnar Lodbrok's daughter. And I leave it all to Orm, or failing him, to Halfdan."

Quiet and composed Thordisa stood. The Danish warrior-blood had spent its force, the woman now was there! She longed to throw herself at Hahkon's feet and beg forgiveness for her stupid Danish fault. But other yarls had come, seeing Yarl Hagen there and horses ready to depart, and each yarl there became a witness of Hahkon's will, that now revoked his gift of land at Tredalund, giving it all to Orm. A herald was then sent for who carved this will in runes, or Northern letters, and bore it to the king; so not a word was said by the repentant wife till her proud lord rode off, and then a flood of tears broke from her bright blue eyes, and in a passion of remorse and grief she swooned upon the floor.

Hahkon and Orm entered the house which Ingvar had appointed for Orm's use, and here they found Yarl Yalmar waiting Orm's return. He greeted Hahkon coldly, and said that on the morrow the holmgang should take place, but as the nearest holm or island was too far removed to be convenient, it was resolved to have a *chest* or *schrucken*, such as was afterwards called in England "lists," set up. As an island was usually chosen on account of its preventing the action of spells and magic by the circle of water surrounding it, so in this case a circular portion of land was cut off from evil influences by a cord stretched over a series of hazel-rods, as we have already had occasion to show when speaking of a trial by Ting, where the circular form of the arena and the mystic power of the hazel wand combined to keep off

supernatural harm. Precisely in a similar manner this kästr or chest was made to preclude the possibility of any magical aid being extended to either combatant.

In this circle a spot pointing to the north was chosen, where the high bank for the three judges was fixed. On each side of the seat intended for Halfdan was a seat for one of the two chiefs, Ingvar and Hubba. On the right and left of this "grand stand" were four seats for four kings; thus, the eight were divided by the three. From the seats of the kings came in regular order those of the yarls, until the circle was complete; and just opposite Halfdan there was a break, serving as a door or gate by which to enter the arena. Here no seat was placed, and here the cord remained unstretched, hanging down from the thin posts, or rods of hazel. At each side of the opening stood heralds, with staves carved full of runes in their hands. In front of Halfdan stood Yalmar with his signal horn, on which, at a sign from Halfdan, he blew a sounding blast. Instantly amongst the crowd outside there was a bustle; way was made, and Grimm fully armed, attended by a stranger yarl as his second, now appeared. The old man marched up to Halfdan, and exclaimed:

"I come, King Halfdan, to clear myself by force of arms of the foul stain cast on me by my best friend, Yarl Hahkon, who, when I wronged him did forgive the wrong, and now demands redress in arms when I have done no wrong at all! So I am here to answer whatever charge he brings."

"Stand to the left, Yarl Grimm," said Halfdan. Then, turning to Yarl Ingvar, he continued, "I wonder why thy brother is not yet upon the ground?"

"He may be somewhat later before he takes his seat. He begged me to beseech thee not to keep back the fight if he should be prevented from coming up to time. Our sister is half frantic, and he has fears to leave her to her women without his presence."

King Halfdan's brow grew cloudy. "I like it not," he said. "To me it is scant courtesy. However, let it pass! Sound again, Yalmar!"

The horn was blown, and in marched Hahkon armed in shining mail. His former helm was on his head, not that which his wife had given him the day that they were wed. The eagle wings were large and grey, the helm was bound with gold. He wore the mighty battle-blade hanging from his yarl's belt. The double-headed battle-axe rested on his shoulder. His shield was banded round with gold. His trellis-work leg-guards were of blue leather, with gold rivets in between. Orm followed with a second shield, and many more were then brought in and placed on either side, to serve the champions should their own be hewn in twain.

Hahkon advanced to where the judges sat, and cried in a loud clear voice :

"I come before these kings and yarls to answer with my life for the nithing post which I set up against my former friend, Yarl Grimm!"

"Stand to the right. The sun is high, and ye must be fairly placed that neither have advantage!"

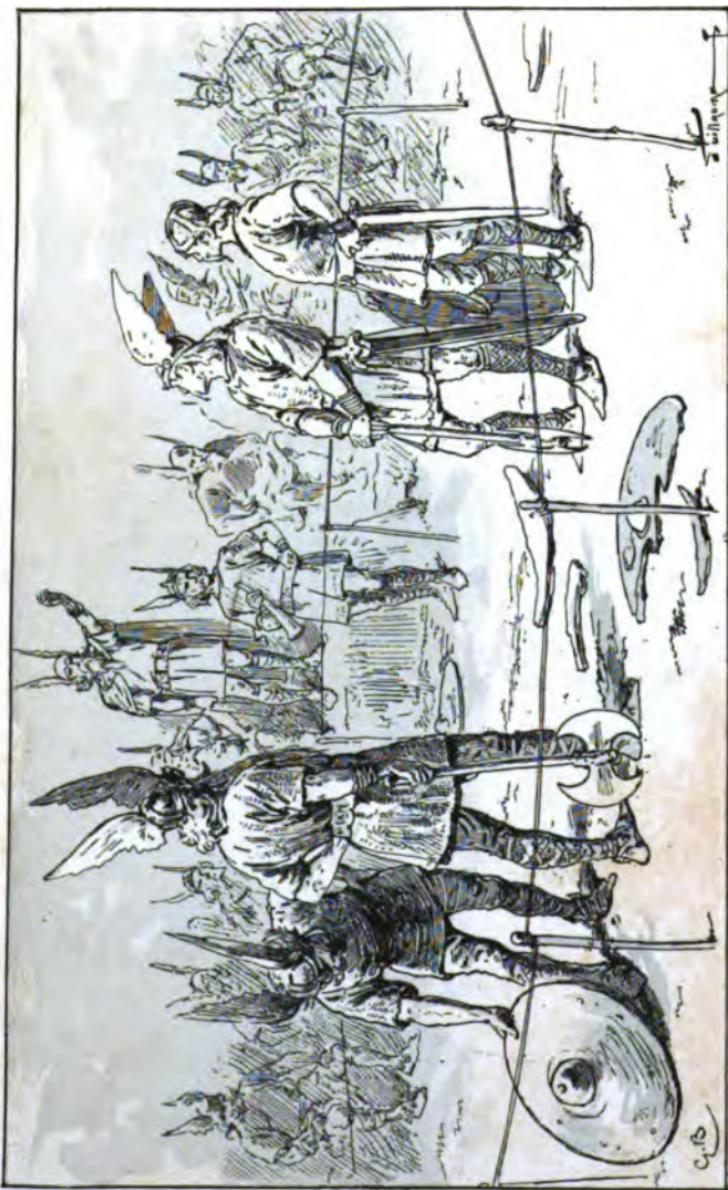
The heralds now came forward and placed the champions, so that neither had more shade or light than his opponent.

When they were placed, Yarl Yalmar blew his horn. The champions neared each other, but it was plain to see that Grimm was far from wishing to

strike his youthful foe, and Hahkon seemed unwilling as Grimm to begin the fray. Again the horn was sounded, and Hahkon raised his axe. Grimm's second then sprang forward and held his shield to meet the dreadful blow. The stroke of either warrior fell on the seconds' shields, cleaving them both in twain. Fresh shields were given, with the same result. Either the seconds were most skilful men, or else the combatants sought but to cleave the shields. Six shields (three for each warrior) were cloven in this way. Then Halfdan bade the horn be blown to stop the fight.

The champions stood and rested with their axe-heads on the ground. Then spake King Halfdan to the throng of those who viewed the fight :

" Kings of the North, nobles and yarls ! we march upon a foe whose strength is great in archers. We shall have need of shields. Now if this fight continue we shall have no shields left. The warriors are too nimble, the seconds too well trained. See, they are both untouched. I count it waste of time to sit and see two yarls playing at chopping wood ! Now listen to my doom, in which friend Ingvar joins me. We are sole judges now. The friends that have been foes, must now be friends again. We left the battle to the gods ; the men are both unscathed. The gods are with them ; yea, are with them both, for I am now convinced that Hahkon stands quite blameless of what he was accused, chiefly by me, in error. Yarl Grimm has never said a word against him. I therefore order Hahkon to pay the usual fees and cost of this assembly, to take the nithing post away, and ask Yarl Grimm for that forgiveness which he once gave him."



"THE CHAMPIONS STOOD AND RESTED WITH THEIR AXE-HEADS ON THE GROUND."—p. 290.

The unknown second here removed his helm, the nasal guard of which was broad, and hid his features, and all the kings and yarls exclaimed,

“Yarl Hubba!”

“Yes,” cried that chieftain; “and I deem it shame thus to be played with! There is no blood shed!”

“That is thy fault, good Hubba,” Halfdan cried; “why didst thou catch the blows upon the shield?”

“That wanted little skill, seeing how they were dealt! But I am judge, as well as Ingvar, and I bar thy doom! Let them now try the sword!”

“Friend Hubba, thou hast left the judgment seat to fight within the *chest*. There thou art combatant, not judge. Thou hast requested that we should not wait for thee in passing sentence on the battle, thus thou hast given thy voice to me and to thy brother, who quite agrees with me.”

The kings and yarls, who had been spectators of this strange scene, now rose up from their seats, and beckoned to their shield-bearers, who straightway brought their masters shields in haste, the masters drew their swords and clanged their loud applause till the whole welkin rang.

Then Hahkon stepping up to Grimm, said: “Yarl, forgive my rage. I do believe that thou hast had no part in these dark rumours about me and mine. Forgive the nithing post. All here have seen thee ready with thine arms to battle for thine honour, and I take much shame for having wronged my friend.”

This speech was greatly applauded, and the two right hands were clasped in friendly grasp once more. Hubba essayed to speak, but there was such a din, such deafening clang of arms, that he at last gave in, and left the lists in silence.

Once more Halfdan rose, and said with courteous tones : "Kings, yarls, and freemen ! Let us hope this fray may be the last among us. We have seen the woe brought on the English by their faction fights. Let us be wiser, friends, I hear the foe is now uniting in the north to meet us ; let us do as they are doing now, not as they did. United, we may share this English land right merrily between us, and *their* loss shows how we ought to act, firmly and well together."

Here deafening applause interrupted him. After a time he thus continued :

"In part I do confess it was my fault through which this fray has happened. Certain silly words, spoken by girls in bower to my wife, must have been wrongly taken, and I was wrong to let a passing cloud come between me and Hahkon. I have his word that he was never guilty of the deed, for which he might have suffered in other hands more keenly. I trust he will forgive me, the friend of Attlé Sigurdson, for doubting, in my hatred of all mean and nithing conduct, his upright heart a moment. Come to the judgment seat ; in token of unbroken friendship, Hahkon, give me thy hand ! Yarl Grimm, come hither, give me thy hand, old steel ! Ha ! thou canst grasp full 'grimly.' And now, my friends, on board my ships of lading there have come sundry grand butts of rare Italian vintage, brought by friend Hahkon there from—eh ? where was it, Hahkon ? Rome ? Well, never mind. The wine is good, and all who will are welcome to join with me in drinking healths to Grimm and Hahkon. My ships have also brought some store of rich wild boar and elk, and other matters to make a jovial feast. I therefore

pray you all to honour me, here in my English home,
by tasting my poor fare."

After the usual applause the meeting broke up, uncertain whether to be amused at the farce of duelling which they had witnessed, or to resent being made parties to what seemed to them so ridiculous. But Halfdan's merry mood was contagious, and he contrived to inspire the fiery Danes with mirth, and to bring them to the feast in high good humour.

It was arranged that Halfdan the Merry, with his Swedish contingent, should march first into Yorkshire and prepare the way for the grand army to follow. To the honour of attending King Halfdan on this hazardous expedition, Hahkon, Grimm, Orm, and other of our friends aspired, and there was no difficulty on the part of the two brothers Ingvar and Hubba offered to this plan. They seemed rather glad to get rid of the Swedes than otherwise. And perhaps a circumstance which we must now relate added in no small degree to this feeling.

Hahkon's strange young wife, with all the tenderness and strict sense of duty so peculiar to the women of the North, had not been brought up, like other young ladies of distinction, in the bower of the wife of some great chief, where she could acquire feminine accomplishments and feminine gentleness and grace. Daughter of a warrior, all she had ever heard of her father had been connected with the sacred duty of avenging his fall. She was only six months old when Ragnar sailed on his last expedition which brought so much misery upon England, and from which, as we know, he never returned. Aslauga, her mysterious mother, disappeared with her golden harp on the day of Ragnar's death, six months after his

departure from Denmark, and was never seen again. Thordisa was then just one year old. The child grew up amidst the wild viking crews that thronged her brothers' court. They lived alone for vengeance ; she drank the idea of revenge into her very being while only yet a babe, and so she had grown up.

Her marriage was mere caprice. She saw young Hahkon, thought him grander and yet gentler than the other vikings, and then her brothers asked her whether she would wed. She loved her husband in a certain savage way, but still the master passion of her heart was fierce revenge.

Now when the false whisper reached her that Hahkon loved another, she straight away believed it. She had no doubt that it was true ; and no question as to whether it was likely crossed her mind. She received the serpent in her heart, and there the reptile stung her. Jealousy, hatred, and revenge left her no room for any other feelings.

In bitter rage she cast him from her heart, and she who had begun to honour and respect her hero husband, now thought of him with hate. We will not view the conflict that raged within her mind ; for who can paint the storm or draw the whirlwind ? She was one of the three cruel maidens who worked the dreadful Raven that proved the bane of England, as we shall see hereafter ; and in that agitated heart of hers there was a tempest we cannot describe : one instant she was overwhelmed with grief, the next she was an incarnate fury.

Distracted by these fierce emotions, she blamed her brother Hubba, who went to see her after the duel scene with Grimm. She loaded him with bitter words and terrible reproaches ; she made the whole fault

his. Then hearing that a dragon ship would sail to Denmark in a day or two, she made her brother promise to send her home in it. Her plan was to stir up among the Danes a feeling of strong hatred to the Swedes, and then to tell them how she had been duped into a sordid marriage with one who loved her not, one whom she had thrown off, but still she lived for sweet revenge on all his kith and kin.

Now she was very rich, and so she thought by dint of wealth and tears and prayers to get together viking swords enough to sail to Tredalund, burn down the house and woods, kill all the cattle, sow the land with salt, murder the peasants, burn their wretched huts, and drive their widows and their babes into the raging sea !

Thus raved Thordisa, till her brother was at last forced to consent to her wild scheme of wrath and rage and ruin. She saddled her own horse and his, rode to the landing-place, and with a scanty train of maidens actually embarked that very night.

When Hubba rode back to the Danish town, he found the mirth in Halsdan's hall had reached the highest pitch ; reckless he entered in, horn after horn he drained, but neither spoke nor laughed ! A pleasant guest was Hubba !

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW HUBBA AND INGVAR MARCHED TO YORK.

SLOWLY and surely the news had spread through England that the Danes, with mighty reinforcements, were marching on the north. The two great rivals, Ella and Osbert, joined their strength at last to crush the cruel Danes, and advanced southwards into Yorkshire to meet them.

York was a town within walls, a "fenced city," such as the Swedes despised. They marched upon it, and in an incredibly short space surrounded it. Hahkon, from his experience at Luna, begged to be sent on in advance, with his champions who had helped him in that renowned affair.

Halfdan consented, and with two hundred men Orm, Sigurd, Biorn, Yarl Brand, and Oloff Skull, the attack on York commenced. The walls were slighter than the old Roman walls that kept them back at Luna and after a fierce assault, the Swedes had gained the town. Devastation followed their success. The townsmen fell by the sword, and before the united forces of Osbert and Ella could arrive to aid the men of York, fire and sword spread wretchedness around. Halfdan's Swedes were everywhere at once, and when the Danes under the sons of Lodbrok joined them, there were no foes to fight.

They soon repaired the walls, and made a central point of York, devastating all the country northward,

until they reached the Tyne, which, however, they did not cross, but returned to York.

Osbert and Ella now moved forwards with the main body of their united Northumbrians, and surprised the main strength of Ingvar's army near York.

It was a complete surprise, and a successful one. The Danes retreated before the firm unbroken English lines into the city. Here the victorious Ella cried to his men, elated with success, "York is our own! The Danes are in a trap! St. Stephen to the rescue! Onwards to the walls."

This attack was a fatal success; for the English, thinking to carry all before them, flung down the weakened walls, and pouring through the breaches rushed pell mell on the Danes.

Their error was soon disclosed, their strength lay in their discipline alone! No two or even three of Ella's men could stand before one Dane in single combat. Their fine formation lost, the English fell a prey to the death-dealing Danish axe and sword. The disunited bands of the Northumbrian troops were doomed to hopeless slaughter. Osbert and Ella, who had too late united in the common cause, were destroyed in horrible tortures.

So complete was the overthrow of the English, that Ingvar, in reward of his skill as a leader, was made King of Northumbria, which thus ceased to be an Anglo-Saxon kingdom, and became a Danish province from the Humber to the Tyne.

It would have been natural to suppose that such wholesale slaughter, such dismal tortures, and such utter devastation of the country might have appeased the thirst for vengeance excited by the fate of Ragnar Lodbrok, but, as Sharon Turner says, "Yet the

invaders did not depart. It was soon evident that their object was to conquer, in order to occupy ; desolation followed their victories because Northmen could not move to battle without it ; but while plunder was the concomitant of their march, dominion became the passion of their chiefs."

The great services rendered by the Swedish contingent placed Halfdan and Hahkon quite at the head of the Scandinavian army, but they had no wish to remain in England. Halfdan especially had calls upon him at home pressing him to return. The yarls who had accompanied him were becoming impatient of delay, and longed for the "sooted roof" in Sweden.

It happened in the massacre of the English at York that Hahkon had twice saved the life of Yarl Grimm. Their friendship had become more intimate than ever, and Hahkon's frank nature had quite thrown off the disagreeable impression produced by Halfdan's words. These two friends and Orm had planned a winter's home life at Tredalund, and proposed to accompany the king on his return, when news was brought to them at York that Ingvar had passed the Humber and entered with his army into Mercia, and had established himself at Nottingham ; that Burrhed, the king of Mercia, had formed an alliance with Ethelred, king of the West Saxons, who had just raised his brother Alfred to a seat on the throne, as a sort of sub-king under him. Now this Alfred was a very clever and energetic king. He had married a Mercian lady, so that his sympathies were as much Mercian as they were anti-Scandinavian. He was indefatigable in exciting the warlike feelings of his

countrymen, while the Mercian nobles, flattered by his marriage with the daughter of one of their number, were as energetic as heart could wish in preparing to repel the Danes under the auspicious generalship of the young king who was to command a division of the army composed partly of Mercians and partly of West Saxons.

When Ingvar became aware of this coalition against him, he sent to York, requesting the Swedes to delay their departure. The messenger arrived just as Halfdan was preparing to embark. The invitation was too tempting ; so instead of sailing back as was at first intended, the whole Swedish contingent, with clanging shields and jovial war-songs, marched to Nottingham to join the Danes.

The force under Burrhed, Ethelred, and Alfred found the Danes in possession of Nottingham, and the Scandinavian chiefs were sufficiently practised in warfare to recognise the difference between the troops now opposed to them and the Northumbrians whom they had so recently overcome. A careful disposition of their strength was the result. Rapidly the walls of the castle of Nottingham (founded on the firm rock-like defence raised by the Romans in ancient times), were repaired, earthworks were thrown up, and it was determined rather to destroy the enemy from the walls than to hazard a general engagement, especially as experience had taught them what English discipline would do.

But it was thought advisable to send out skirmishers to annoy the English army on its approach, and to lead it to such parts of the walls of the town as were best furnished with machines for flinging showers of stones at the assailants.

On the occasion of the very first of these pretended attacks and sham retreats, Hahkon asked and obtained permission to ride out with Orm and Grimm, with a view of drawing the English into this trap. Consent was readily obtained, and so the three friends rode forth.

Merrily shone the summer sun on "helm and hauberk's twisted mail," as our three friends led a body of some two hundred Swedes to the sham attack on the English camp. "Ha!" quoth Hahkon, "it is, after all, a pleasant land this England; and it will be a pleasanter when the fat-headed English loons are all cut down, and their howling churchmen hung! Ha, ha! I remember, when a boy, my first exploit in England, and the war in Kent! We have avenged Yarl Ragnar. I next shall avenge my father, Attlé Sigurdson, the brave Sea-Wolf, my warriors!"

"There never was such splendid practice for the sword as here, in 'merry England,'" said Orm, with a joyous laugh. "Yarl Grimm looks ten years younger, and Halfdan never was so merry. What says Yarl Grimm?"

But what Yarl Grimm would have said was lost for ever. A brilliant party of English horse burst on them at the gallop. A clump of trees had hidden them from sight, and they were on the Swedes before they were aware; before the shock was felt a cloud of javelins was hurled by the advancing troop at the astonished Swedes. Of these, one entered old Yarl Grimm's right eye, crashed through his brain, and hurled him dead to earth.

The Swedes soon rallied from this sharp surprise, but they could make no way against the discipline of England; down they went, horse and man. A yarl,

whose name escapes us, led back the troop to town, but sorely thinned in numbers. Half of that brave band they left upon the plain. Yarl Grimm was slain, and Hahkon and Orm were prisoners.

No pen can paint the rage of Halfdan and of Ingvar on hearing that the pride of the North, the "Young Sea-Eagle," was in the foeman's hands! A desperate sally from the town was made, and the English horse withdrew. The Danes and Swedes were furious! They found Grimm's body cold, and had just time to bring it within the gates before the tidings came that a much larger body, thousands strong, was marching to the attack!

Rapidly machines were fixed upon the walls to hurl darts, stones, and javelins at the foe. A larger troop of horse under King Halfdan left the gates, and a still denser mass of Danes, with battle-axes, left under Ingvar, who, on foot, marched forward to repel the host.

Halfdan charged in fury; Halfdan the Grim! A fighting king of a fighting time, in first-rate fighting humour! Years had not changed him much. A fine tall, stout, good-humoured king of fifty winters, more or less, he looked much younger in his merry mood; but in his mood of rage, as now, no man could guess his age.

He rode a grand grey war-horse, like a cloud bearing the god of war. His lance was flung. Some English leader fell. He followed up his lance. His battle-axe gleamed high in air. Saddles were emptied in the flash of the descending gleam.

But all his valour, all his rage, could not avail to break the steady wedge into which form the English fell after the first attack. No face was to be seen

nothing but shields. The front rank of the warriors was protected by shield-bearers, who knelt down behind their shields, guarding themselves and the spearmen, who were armed with tremendous spears projecting far before them. The butt ends of these spears were shod with spikes of iron which rested in the earth, giving the spear a firm grip of the ground ; the shaft was steadied by the warrior's left hand, his right hand held the smaller shield. This rank stooped somewhat down to let the hinder rank present their spears above them. This second rank of spearmen held their shields so as to overlap those of the other spearmen. The third rank was of cavalry armed with tremendous spears, projecting over both the other ranks, and covered with their shields. The sight of this formation would have reminded one of that odd animal the porcupine, with all its quills exposed.

Within the wedge the archers had their place, whence by shooting upwards the foe was much annoyed. No cavalry could pierce this wedge, no foe break down its sides. A bristling wall of pointed steel met them at every turn. Enraged, exhausted, Halfdan withdrew his horse, and Ingvar with his battle-axes in vain assailed the wedge. The weighty arrows aimed above fell down on them like hail, and when they raised their shield a storm of spears was flung with such unerring aim as stretched them on the ground.

Dispirited, the Danes withdrew ; but as they left the field a cloud of arrows followed them, thinning their numbers in retreat.

A mighty grave was raised for Grimm outside the city walls, and the English never offered to disturb the funeral rites. He was buried in his armour, with

his helmet and his sword. His spear lay close beside him, his shield upon his breast. With all that a warrior holds dear they laid him in his mound. With many a chaunt and many a prayer they bade farewell to Grimm.

All summer through, and autumn, these foes continued thus. The Danes could see no chances for such a battle-field as cheers the sons of Odin, and draws the vultures down. They kept behind the stubborn walls for the first time in history, and the English, after one or two attempts, gave up all thought of taking such a fortress, thus guarded, by assault.

And so the winter coming on it was agreed at last that a parley should be held without the city walls. Three chiefs should come on either side unarmed, and fix the terms on which the Danes should leave the town, and the English host withdraw.

Ingvar, Halfdan, and Hubba, walked at the appointed time to an open field, about a bowshot from the walls. Burrhed, Ethelred, and Alfred, the young king, came from the English side. The terms they made were these :

The Danes were to retire to York, leaving Mercia, and promising not to molest that country.

The English were to return home and disarm for the winter.

The Danes asked for their prisoners, which article was not granted by the English ; so after many words and much chaffering the two first points were settled upon on both sides, the English retaining the prisoners as hostages for the good faith of the Danes.

All this was advantageous to the Danes, allowing them a footing in the island established as of right. The proper way would then have been to have

insisted that all their host should leave. However, this was not insisted on; the Danes remained, and soon were reinforced by other hosts from Denmark. Ethelred and Alfred then marched home, proud to have helped the Mercians, and to have sent the Danes away from Burrhed's land.

Hahkon and Orm were carried into Wessex, where they were treated well. But we must leave them in the hands of these West Saxons to follow Hahkon's wife, the vengeance-loving Thordisa.

The bark bearing this lady back to Denmark pulled twenty-four stout oars. She flew the red war flag and raven, because she had in charge the daughter of Ragnar, surnamed Lodbrok.

No change disturbed the peace of Thordisa's voyage until the morning of their fourth day's sail. The look-out in the "basket," or "crow's nest," on the mast descried a viking sail on the starboard bow.

"What ship is that?" demanded the stranger bark.

"The 'Osprey,' just from England, going home."

"Why going home?"

"We carry Lodbrok's daughter back from the English coast, and certain ladies of her train. What ship are you?"

"'Thor's Mallet,' out of Drontheim. We are Gunther's men, sworn foes to Lodbrok and his race. Give us the ladies!"

"Come and take them, then."

These words meant battle, as Thordisa knew, and so she went on deck to urge the men to fight for life and death, and rather to go down to Rana [goddess of the deep] all standing than strike the sail to Gunther.

"Ay, ay, my lady; never fear! We'll show that

Danish swords can bite through Norway iron. Go thou below, we shall defend the ladies."

"I will go presently; but tell me, my good yarl, what is that vessel in the offing there? Now there are two, or more."

A glance sufficed to show his practised eye that they were all Norwegians as they came rowing up. "Thor's Hammer" tried to come to closer quarters; lowered her sail, lay in her oars, and flinging two huge grappling irons on board, commenced to haul close on board the "Osprey." The yarl commanding seized a Danish axe and cut in twain the chain that held the hook. A shower of javelins was the quick reply from the good ship "Thor's Hammer." Arrows and spears and stones were hurled with fury from each dragon's side. The "Osprey" seemed about to be victorious when her champions were aware that other ships were bearing down upon her. From the first of these a rough coarse voice roared out: "Board her, ye lubbers; board her with the axe."

The language was the dialect of Norse spoken in Norway, differing from Danish no more than English in the lowland parts of Scotland differs from London speech. But still it was enough of difference to show Thordisa that her father's foes had now surrounded her.

"Follow me!" she cried, as she and all her maidens rushed on deck. "Father, we come! Rana will never dare to keep thy daughter back when thou dost call! Throw all your arm-rings in the deep," she cried, now speaking to her maidens. "Rana loves gold, and we must win her favour."

Then the fair golden-haired damsels cast their golden bracelets from them deep into the sea. Then,

with a desperate cry, Thordisa, like the spirit of the storm, sprang over the ship's side ! Bravely her maidens, rather than be slaves to Lodbrok's hated foes, sought in the waves their doom. A moment the white robes fluttered in the breeze and they were gone ! The awe-struck warriors gazed spell-bound at this weird scene. Then, such as were not casting javelins or launching spears or tugging at the oars, sprang overboard to try, if possible, to save them. But soon a storm of arrows from the Norsemen's ships bereft these men of life. The waves were far too high for boats to live in such a sea, the currents strongly struggling with the waves bore the brave ladies far from the fighting ships. They were never heard of more, and the brave vikings who had sought the waves sank to the realms of Rana. Those on board maintained unequal combat. The fierce Norwegians, animated by the memory of some insult or slight done to Yarl Gunther by the great Dane, and exasperated by the loss of Thordisa and her train, cut down all on board the "Osprey," and, tossing their bodies to the deep, took possession of that good ship, which they manned by contributions of sailors from their own vessels.

Two days after this they fell in with some neutral Swedish ships, to whom they boasted of their victory, and of the death of Thordisa ; and these Swedes arriving at the mouth of the Humber, spread the news amongst the Scandinavians that Ragnar Lodbrok's daughter had perished in the waves. But the report did not reach Hahkon's ears, as he was in bondage.

According to the agreement entered into by the Danes at Nottingham, they had left Mercia,

recrossing the Humber, and now repaired to York, where they proposed to winter.

It was a winter of intense hardship to the English being again exceptionally severe ; but to the Scandinavians, accustomed as they were to still intenser cold, it was a pleasant time. The Danes employed it in the usual manner. Feasting and drinking were the order of the day, and in their halls they swore, in many a drinking bout, that vengeance must be taken for Thordisa's fate. Strangely enough, they did not seem to feel that, not the English, but Gunther's men in Norway should be punished. Revenge is blind, and having tasted blood, the fiery Danes were fiercer than before ; they saw no difference, in their heathen rage ; blood must have blood, and English blood was nearest, and therefore that should flow. But they had promised to withdraw from Mercia, and loyal to their word for once, they did not think of visiting this deed on Burrhed. Another way lay open, which was to carry war into East Anglia. They thought how easy it would be to sail to Yarmouth, anchor in the roads, and march on Edmund's Burg. In open Ting this was resolved upon with no dissentient voice.

The spring was late, but very lovely, in the year of grace 870. Ingvar had somewhere heard that Edmund, after all, possessed some warlike skill, and so with viking cunning he resolved to strike him un-awares.

A certain Anglian earl, Ulfketul, heard the news of the great fleet approaching Yarmouth Roads, and begged King Edmund to allow him to arm East Anglia. Edmund saw no need ; besides which, he was busy in the preparations for the Church festival of Easter. It was a time of fast, he said, and he had

other thoughts than war. But as the earl still urged some preparation, at last he gave consent. It was, alas! too late. The hasty measures that the earl now took were ill adapted to repel the Danes, who were always prepared for war. Ulfketul met the Danes at Thetford, where a decisive battle crushed the East Anglian might for ever.

All around the frontiers horrors raged, but Edmund marked it not till summoned by the haughty Dane to "divide his treasures with him, accept the faith of Odin, and reign as viceroy or lieutenant under him." The message ended nearly in these words: "For who art thou that should withstand our might? The storms of ocean never hold us back from any enterprise. They serve our barks for oars, they are our servants. Thor's thunder harms not us; we are his children, he our god; but it affrights our foes! His lightnings are our glory. The winds and waves are ours! Submit, then, to a master whom the elements obey."

Edmund was advised by his bishops to submit, but though weak and irresolute in worldly things, his heart was like a rock in questions of the faith. He told the Dane who brought this haughty message to hasten to his master, and give him this reply :

"Tell thy commander I despise his idols. I serve the God of peace, and therefore have not stained my hands with Danish blood, although the ravages that ye have made demand it at my hands. I am not frightened by his threats. His wrath is nought to me. Let his rapacious greed rob me of all my treasures; one treasure I possess far beyond heathen might. My soul is pure, my conscience is at rest. Destroy

this frail and falling body, like a despised vessel, but the freedom of my soul he can never bow or bend! Better is it for us to defend our freedom with our lives than to beg mercy with our tears. Death before servility! Hence my spirit shall fly to heaven from its prison, fouled by no black spot of submission to a Dane! The kingdom ye have desolated here on earth presents not much for you to offer now, but there is a crown above of which ye cannot rob me. Give him this answer."

This brave speech ought to have been made four years before. All opposition to the Danes was useless now. The just reproaches stung them into rage. They dragged the king forth and bound him to a tree, where his body was cruelly lacerated with the knout or whip of many thongs and little balls of iron for the knots. Still he was patient. Then they shot at him with arrows, striving who should strike a leg or arm, but not a vital part. Still he prayed on, and never lost his hope in Him who suffered more than human heart can dream to give us comfort in the end. At last fierce Ingvar, losing patience, drew his sword, and cried, "Die, then!" With one blow he cut off his head, and the East Anglian kingdom was no more.

The object of the destruction of the East Angles was to have an open road to Wessex. The Danes had seen when they entered Mercia that the West Saxon sword was bared in her defence, but arguing from what they learnt of English ways, they thought the chances very much against the Mercians helping Wessex, and time showed that the wily Danes were right! The petty narrow-minded policy prevailed that paved the way for ruin. Burhred never stirred a

step to help his generous friends, the Western Saxons, although every battle fought in Wessex threatened the Mercian crown.

Ingvar now placed Yarl Guthorm as a guard over East Anglia, and returned to Hubba in Northumberland. Here he found Halfdan, whose influence had restrained the Danes from devastating Mercia, because of his pledged word, but he had no objection to commence a war against the Western Saxons.

The wars of the Danes with Alfred, the defeat of his brother Ethelred, and Alfred's accession to the West Saxon crown after his brother's death, are matters known in history. But in the first reverse the vikings met at Ashdown, their loss in chiefs was great. Yarl Yalmar fell, and many yarls were slain, while of the Northern kings who joined the host, Halfdan alone escaped.

Disasters threatened Alfred on every side. His people, from constant warfare, were sunk in ignorance. Alfred himself, when twelve years old, could not read English! And much uphill work and fearful labour did it cost this great and glorious hero to overcome difficulties which, in great measure through his exertions, have ceased to exist for us.

His people were exposed to the attacks of the merciless vikings, who had actually gained a footing in the land, and who were being constantly reinforced from the North, and there were no war-ships to guard the coast! Again, the English were so unlettered that it was difficult to know where to begin to teach them anything. The priests knew a little Latin, so did he, and what was the use of it? So this great king, having first obtained a victory over himself, began to attack the giants of ignorance, sloth, and

superstition, which ruled in England. At first he looked abroad to foreign nations famed for certain special things. The Scandinavians were the best shipbuilders, the best sailors, and the best soldiers of the century; but to the Danes he could not apply. The Swedes seemed too remote and so did the Norwegians. The Romans had the reputation of producing the best literature, but part of it was pagan! and, besides, it was unsuited to the temper of his people, who still were Scandinavians at heart, though much oppressed by priestcraft and unnerved by sloth. They still had English minds and English hearts, but how to get at these through so much outer-crust of ignorance? This was a knotty point, and one that no man who was not equally good and wise could have solved.

Amongst the prisoners to the West-Saxon sword Alfred was told that two young Swedish or Norwegian heroes had been taken; they were evidently men of rank and influence, their dress and arms, their lofty bearing were all recounted to the king, who, thinking it wisdom to learn even from his foes, sent for them to his presence, and was startled at the appearance of these sons of Thor.

It must be remembered that the English of Alfred's time was not so widely different from the other Scandinavian or North "German" tongues as it has since become, besides that Alfred's contact with the Danes had made the Northern tongues somewhat familiar to his ear, so when Hakon and Orm were brought before him in his hall, they understood his questions and he their replies.

They were surprised at Alfred. A young king, with a sweet, melancholy, pensive face, which at a word,

however, kindled up, as at a flash of godlike inspiration, into a glowing warrior's glance, or more angelic rapture! He sat upon the high bank of his hall, and greeted them with kindness as they stood before his dais. A grave and priestly-looking man sat next the monarch's chair, inscribing certain characters on parchment with a pen.

The king wore the long garment used in peace; a purple mantle, held by a rich brooch, covered the robe. His shoes were delicately formed, well fitting, but rather longer than was needful, though not extravagantly so. He wore a simple cap of purple silk, with a deep band of gold.

"Who art thou, warrior?" he said to Hahkon; then glancing at his belt, continued, "an earl, I see. What is thy name?"

"Hahkon, the son of Attlé Sigurdson, commonly called the Sea-Wolf."

"Art thou a Dane?"

"I am a Swede."

"Ha!" exclaimed Alfred. "That I like to hear. Is that a friend of thine?"

"The dearest friend I have, my foster-brother."

"Friendship is a right holy tie. It speaks of deepest love and wisdom joined together! What is thy name, sir friend?"

"Orm is my name; some call me Orm of the Iron Hand, but briefly I am Orm."

"Are ye both vikings?"

"That we were till now."

"Come to the high bank, Orm and Hahkon both. I fain would have some converse with you. I pray you, sit by me. The brave are welcome guests to freemen's homes. Come to the dais to me."

With a good deal of the manner and air of modern naval officers the two young Swedes ascended to the seat which Alfred offered them. There was a mixture of well-bred courtesy with careless dash about them that charmed the English king, who said some words in Latin to the scribe, who smiled and bowed his head.

Alfred now asked our champions many things about their lives and their adventures, which they explained so much to his delight, that he, at last, finding that though young they were experienced leaders, made them an offer to remain with him, to aid him in his plans for raising the West Saxon people from the low state in which he found them.

"I want," he said, "well-tried and trusty navigators to teach me all about your northern coasts, and I will gladly pay you, if ye undertake to gain this information for me."

"Yes. I do know a very clever shipman, named Ochthere, a Swede, who has been all along the Scandinavian coast. And if thou wilt, I'll sail to Tredalund, for he lives near my land, and I will tell him of thy wish. If thou dost set me free. But this I tell thee, I cannot be forced. In freedom as one man may serve another I will help thee, but not as captive slave."

King Alfred smiled : "The Northmen all are very cunning, friend, and thou art strange to me. However, as I like thy frankness, I will grant thy freedom, but only on condition that thou return with Ochthere, thy friend."

"Good," replied Hahkon ; "wilt thou have me swear? I swear upon my sword and bracelet to return, and Orm shall be my hostage."

This was agreed on, and the king asked many other questions. At last he made proposals that Orm and Hahkon should renounce the North, and come and live in England. He offered Hahkon wealth and English rank, and to make Orm a thane.

The Swedes were much delighted with his words, but Hahkon said at last :

"Sir King, I cannot tell ; but give me leave to visit Tredalund, and find Ochthere first. Then let me see King Halfdan, to whom I have sworn service for my land. If he should not consent, why then there is an end of living here with thee. Halfdan is in Northumbria, I believe, but I shall find him when I once am free."

"Thou lovest freedom, Hahkon ?"

"Men call me the Sea-Eagle."

"And Orm ?"

"It is the air in which Swedes live."

"Are ye Christians ?"

"No. We are sons of Odin."

"Hast thou ever heard the Christian creed, friend Hahkon ?"

"When quite a boy I was baptized in Kent."

"Hearest thou, Asser ? He has been baptized ! Why, then, he is a Christian."

"Nay, King Alfred, that I am not. The Christians are such nithings. They say they follow Christ, and act from holy love. But they do nothing of the kind. They are a slothful set ; their priests are worse than they."

Here Asser, Alfred's friend and best biographer, looked stern. Alfred smiled gravely as he said :

"We shall talk more of this anon. Upon thy promise, Hahkon, thou art free ; but Orm remains as

a hostage. He shall be free within our royal town if he will swear to stay till thy return."

This was promised, and Alfred invited his prisoners to dine with him as guests. He took them to the bower of his queen, who greeted them most kindly. She was very young and of surpassing beauty; she was the daughter of Ethelred, a Mercian Earl of Gain, now Gainsborough. The young wife had brought to Wessex two fair English girls, her sisters, to bear her company in her West-Saxon home. The ladies were together in their bower-room when the young pagans entered. There was a little shock of fear at sight of these huge warriors, who looked like giants by the side of Alfred. But their respectful way with women, and courteous mien to all, soon made them friends.

The lovely Ethelswitha said some words touching the Danish host, and to the great surprise of our young Swedes lamented that they were not Christian. "For if they were," she said, "there would be hope for them, although they have wrought bitter woe to English lands. We often pray that God may turn their hearts to Him, and all may yet be well."

"Thou dost not wish to send our souls to Hela?"

[Hela, in the ancient pagan creed, was but the name of the goddess of the lower world to which the souls of those were sent who did not die in battle, or who were cowards. Her name lives on in our hell, but to the pagans did not carry such dread meaning.]

"Oh, no!" said Ethelswitha. "God forbid. We may not wish you harm, much less such fearful woe as that thou mentionest!"

"I think it very odd," said Hahkon; "very odd, indeed, that English Christians leave the Danes in

peace, and give them food and horses when they ask, though they are but invaders in the land, and strive their best to rend the bread ye eat out of your famished hands. Either 'tis good ; nay, very good, or nithing cowardice. I know not which !”

“ Was the poor murdered Edmund, of East Anglia, a coward ? He died a martyr to the faith ; he helped you at your need, and well ye paid him ! Say, who was the hero there, the noble Edmund bleeding at the tree, helpless yet steadfast, or the brutal Dane who hewed his corpse in twain ? Oh ! for my part,” she said, and looked with her pure eyes and mien as though in very deed an angel, “ I would bear all the tortures that he bore to wear the crown he wears.”

There was so much of conviction and absolute certainty in the truth of what she uttered, in the queen's tone and air, that Hahkon felt his former doubts revive as to the faith of Odin. The sweet and pleasant Christian hymns he had heard nearly ten years ago came stealing to his memory faintly like the music of the Æolian harp, touched by no mortal hand, but sounding with a supernatural sweetness. He looked confused, surprised, and greatly moved.

It is well known, at least it ought to be well known, that our great king was eminently pious. That is to say, he was no bigot or fanatic like the weak-minded Edward, whose fondness for external piety made him despise his race, and follow the imperial tyrant Rome until his folly lost the land his brave forefathers won ! No ; Alfred was truly, really, and sincerely a religious man, who practised all that he believed, and strove to live a Christian. His first and mightiest effort was conquest of himself. To overcome the evils of his nature was this great king's first work. He had the

light of the true Christian faith; and his sincere desire was that his subjects all should have the self-same opportunities of comfort and of hope as he, therefore he had translated into English the gospels, the prayers, and anthems of the Church, and saw that organs were provided for the churches. He played upon the harp and also on the organ, and in the bower of his gentle queen, a fair and stately hall, there was a splendid organ.

Now, when King Alfred saw the working in Hahkon's mind of what this lady said, he signed to Ethelswitha, who at once went to her organ, and with ready hand poured forth the glorious harmony of the Magnificat. The two girls joined the chant. Alfred and the churchman, Asser, lent their voices to swell the holy lay.

No pen could ever do full justice to the charm wrought on those rugged hearts by the rare sight and noble strains which held their senses captive. Seeing the effect, King Alfred, when the chant was ended, turned to the pagans with his holy smile, and said :

"Friend Hahkon, we must speak together of these things hereafter. I fain would see thee and thy foster-brother *free*. And take my word upon it, there is but one way for it. There is one King, and only one 'whose service is perfect freedom.' Ye are welcome here. My wife and I, Eadburga and Edith, are always willing to explain these things, and how it is we know them. But the horn sounds to dinner. Ye have promised me to dine with me to-day. Come to the hall with me."

Some weeks flew by in this sweet intercourse, and the combined effects of music and this life softened the champion's heart still more and more. One

morning Hahkon said to Orm, "Thou knowest the strange tale of Aslauga within the elfin harp, who, when the champion felt depressed or sad sprang from the harp and soothed him with its tones! The memory of my father and of our raid on England when I was yet a boy may be compared to her. The music of this king calls back the good old priest who preached to us in Kent, and with him all the memories of that long-distant time."

Said Orm, "But she dwelt in the harp, and when the tune was played she used to vanish into it again. One day the champion tried to seize her as she fled into the elfin harp, but caught her streaming golden hair, a lock of which remained behind within his grasp, but she was never seen again. The golden hair was strung upon the harp, and there it still remains!"

"Orm, these old stories of our fathers' faith no longer strike that chord within my breast that they were wont to sound. I know not what it is, but that same pensive yet heroic king has overthrown much that I thought secure!"

"I think the Lady Eadburga has some share in this thy change of manner! Is she Aslauga, Hahkon?"

But Hahkon laughed. "I cannot tell," he said, "how far those gentle beings are to blame for any change in me. However it may be, they certainly are Christians who act up to their faith, and I *believe in Alfred!*"

At length the time arrived when Hahkon should depart. He left the English king reluctantly, and he on his part learnt to love the pagan youth who conscientiously had sought "*to do his Lord's behest.*"

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW HAHKON RETURNED TO TREDALUND.

THE Anglo-Saxon ships at this time, like those of the rest of the world, were vastly inferior to those of Scandinavia, and that given by Alfred to Hahkon was no exception to the rule. In fact, that distinguished viking looked with immense contempt upon the whole vessel and her fittings too. From keel to truck, from stem to stern, she was a "lubberly craft," he said, "an old washing-tub."

But greatly to his delight, and almost enough so to counterbalance his disgust at the ship, he found it hung round with Swedish shields. Alfred had taken in a skirmish, some time before the capture of our hero, a band of Swedish vikings, and had been puzzled what to do with them. His mind revolted from the thought of slaying them in chains, fettered body and soul. They therefore had remained under a faithful guard, well fed, well treated, and well lodged, though prisoners. These he now sent on board to carry Hahkon home. He made no bargain with them, he only came on board with Hahkon to yield him up the helm.

But when he saw them standing at their stations, and heard the shout with which they greeted Hahkon, he thought, no wonder that they ruled the waves, having such dauntless mien and perfect discipline!

He spoke to Hahkon and his Swedish crew,

saying, "I give you freely this poor ship, the best I have, and wish you all 'God speed.' I leave it to thy Northern honour, Hahkon, to serve me as I said, but I impose no oath, I take no promise ; do the best thou canst to aid thy friend King Alfred."

He turned and left the ship. The Swedes were much astonished at his words, and cheered him loudly as he left the side.

The wind was fair, and the "lubberly craft" behaved pretty well under the viking management. No incident worth note occurred till on the "Western Sea" (as it was then called), they met a dragon sailing to the south. Hahkon prepared for fight, but finding that the crew were also Swedes, he told his name and nation. The viking warrior who steered the ship uttered a shout of joy on hearing Hahkon's name. It was Yarl Thorgills, who ten years ago had aided in the coffin scene at Luna.

Who can describe the joy with which these comrades met ? Only those can know it who have served afloat, and felt that dearer tie than kinship that binds two messmates to each other. That love is a descendant of the viking love which bound our sires together in the far back past. When Thorgills stepped on board all Hahkon's cares seemed banished. With glee he asked for news of Tredalund. He was himself again.

"All goes on well. Halfdan's son Harald wears the crown, and has recalled thy kinsman Thorkell, whom it seems he loved. I hate the nithing ; but it seems that since his marriage with the granddaughter of Grimm, whom thou hast slain in combat, he has much improved. The government of Tredalund at least is in her hands, and she is clever !"

"My dear old comrade," Hahkon said, and

laughed, "thy tidings are the queerest ever heard. Firstly, King Halfdan is alive and very hearty. They say he will be king of some fair place in England as well as Sweden. Harald was to be king in Norway, as I thought. It is very strange. That he could have been chosen by the Ting passes my understanding. That Thorkell has been named my heir at Tredalund is not so bad ; the man my father named as his successor was to have been mine, and if men deem me dead there is no reason why he should not succeed. As for the grandchild of old Grimm, I am glad she is so good a wife. He should have had Thordisa ! As to her grandsire, I never slew the man. He fell in battle as a champion should."

Yarl Thorgills looked at Hahkon, and then at last he said : "Thou spakest of Thordisa. Didst thou mean old Ragnar's daughter, whom the Norwegians slew ? "

"How ! Slain by the Norwegians ? How was that, my friend ? "

"It seems that on the homeward trip she met Yarl Gunther's men. I know not, for I never heard why she went out to Britain. Some say she went to urge her brothers on to greater fury ; some say she wedded one of our yarls. That thou wilt have heard of, and know it better than I can. Whoever the husband was in that case must have had a tight hand, for men say she was a Tartar ! "

"Did Gunther's warriors slay Thordisa ? "

"I cannot rightly tell ; some say that rather than be taken she sprang overboard and perished, which I in part believe, for why should Gunther's people do a nithing deed and kill a chieftain's daughter ? Besides,

if they had done so, they would not have forged a lie to screen themselves from harm."

"Yes, I think with thee ; but I must call Gunther to account, for thou art right in saying she was wed. I was the bridegroom, Thorgills ! "

"Let me go with thee, Hahkon. It will be stubborn work, for Gunther's men are mighty and thou wilt need not only brains (of them thou hast enough), but thou must have more force than thou hast in this galley. Thor's my life ! Old friend, it is a scurvy craft for such a tar as thou."

"It is a gift from Alfred, king of the West Saxons, Yarl, so are the men."

"How so ?"

"They all were taken prisoners by that king, and he has given them their liberty to serve this cruise with me. I must return to give him tidings of my friend the shipman Ochthere. Knowest thou aught of him ? "

"I think he is at home in Lundaberg. However, that is not so very far from Tredalund, and thou canst ride over any day and see. But touching this same visit to Yarl Gunther, it is not well for thee to go alone. Return to Tredalund, turn out thy kinsman from the nest, gather thy men, who love thee heart and soul, and I will sail with thee to Gunthervik."

"I like thy scheme, but must see Harald first ; for if he has placed my kinsman in my nest, he will be sad to see the true bird back again."

"Agreed ; but sail home first. It may be that thy nithing kinsman will flee in terror at the sight of thee, and that will go against him in the Ting and fight thy battle for thee."

And so it was arranged. The two friends sailed together ; just as they came in sight of the bluff head that guarded the well-known bay, two dragon ships flew forward and darted down on them. But from the mast of Hahkon's ship there waved a pale blue flag bearing the young Sea-Eagle. The ships which had prepared to run down Hahkon's craft and board her with their axes, slackened speed when they beheld his "token" (as it was called of yore), and such a tumult then arose on board as made the winds rejoice !

"Hahkon is back again ! Hahkon the young Sea-Eagle, Hahkon of Tredalund. Hurrah for the true Yarl Hahkon, son of the grim Sea-Wolf ! Hahkon the lord of Luna ! Hurrah for our yarl ! "

The ships were his, commanded by his friends, who gladly came on board to hear what news he brought. They were right glad to learn that Halfdan was alive ; they loved not Harald, who they said was far too proud, too much a tyrant to rule over Swedes. Besides, they said, he had been bred in Norway and loved Norwegians best. This was good news to Hahkon, who loved not that the land should ever go from Halfdan.

By this time they had anchored in the bay. Some other dragons lying there on guard, rowed up to view the strangers. When they found their fighting yarl come home again, their joy surpassed all bounds. The shields were taken from the vessel's side, a sign of perfect peace. The swords leapt forth from all the scabbards with a bound, to sound a warrior welcome. "Hahkon is home again !" was now the cry, and as his small boat or yolly touched the strand, a dozen champions rushed to do him honour. His men who rowed sprang from the boat

to haul it up the beach, and Hahkon would have leapt ashore, but——think what the champions did ! Ten of a side they raised the boat. Others put ropes beneath her keel and passed them to their shoulders, so the boat hung, suspended by the ropes from these stout warriors' shoulders ! They carried him in triumph up the path that led to the yarl's hall.

But long before they reached the dwelling-house the news of his return had spread. Thorkell had mounted in affright, and, with his wife and some few faithful servants, fled for his life to Barnangen, now his by death of old Yarl Grimm, who left it before witnesses to his granddaughter Heckla, and to her heirs for ever.

So that when Hahkon came to Tredalund, it was his home again, after five years of absence. Many things were changed. Brenda was dead. The fine old steward, too, was gone, and there were signs of stinting and of avarice around that made the hall look pinched. Few shields were on the wall, not more than half-a-dozen. There was a bareness in the place that made it most unhomelike.

But the warriors sang as they clanked along, according to Northern wont, a lay as wild and simple as their own warrior hearts, though not so full of force.

THE MARCH HOME.

Sound the shield and shake the brand !

Hahkon home from Hilda* fares.

Waves ! roar welcome on the strand,

As the bark our hero bears !

Harp and horn make glad his home,

Walls with war-weeds decked appear,

Dragons o'er the dark sea's foam

Hahkon's haughty helm shall bear !

* Goddess of war.

Free the mead shall flow once more,
Long withheld by hated hand ;
And the board a bounteous store
Bear for Hahkon's bonny band.

Once more on the war-fast walls
Shields shall shine and lances light ;
Hahkon's name fill Hahkon's hall
Full of freemen famed in fight.

Welcome we the hero's son
Borne home by the breezes free,
Odin's sun ne'er shone upon
Leader better loved than he !

The noisy throng, with shout and rejoicing, bore Hahkon in triumph to Tredalund, and the skald appeared and wakened the string that had slumbered in silence for many a year. The fire soon blazed, and the board was soon spread. The news flew abroad like the wind. Yarl Hahkon is home, and the nithing has fled ! Hurrah for Yarl Hahkon the brave ! It was a rejoicing like the sudden return of a glorious summer's day, after a cloudy and tempestuous night ! Such a meal had not been enjoyed by those rough and ready rovers since Hahkon's departure on the war-path, and few had cared to sit at that table. And now ! it was magic ! Whence did they all come ? How could the news have become so quickly known ? There was hardly room in that immense chamber for the throng of men of might and muscle who sought the honour of hanging their shields in Hahkon's hall.

Day dawned upon the revel, and the vikings in hall had not half ended their vows of allegiance and promises of support through thick and thin, the skalds had not half exhausted their wonderful lays made on

the subject of Hahkon's deeds, when the sun fired flood and field, and the whole company of brave men lay down to snatch a few hours' rest.

Mid-day came, and still they slumbered on; Hahkon was in bower, or portion of the building set apart for the lady of the house, when there was one, and rather more comfortable than the hall. There being no ladies left, Hahkon could use one of the rooms as his bed-chamber. The huge assembly of yarls and free-men were on the floor of the hall. Suddenly they were awakened by the notes of a horn, sounded close to the precincts of the hall. And lo! a troop of merry maidens appeared, led by a lovely goddess-like beauty, with golden locks to make man remember her for ever, even if they should or could forget the command, "Forget me not!" beaming from her deep blue eyes! Time had dealt gently with Fulda of the "Stormy Ness." No man who gazed upon her now would have thought that she was eight years older than when we last saw her! The same angelic look was there; why, she might have been sixteen! The same laughing glance that deepened the blue of her eye from that of heaven to that of the sea. A rare creature, a plant of pure Scandinavian growth was Fulda.

The warriors started to their feet, not knowing where they were; the whole scene was so sudden and so strange, they could not for the life of them tell what the vision meant. But the bells on the palfreys' bridles showed it was not a dream, and the merry laugh of the maidens was not from the world of shades. So the yarl was summoned hastily, and he threw on his rich blue tunic, he flung on his warrior's mantle and donned the crested cap. Then he stepped to hall to greet her, Fulda the vala.

"Welcome, fair Fulda, welcome, merry maids.
My hall is not a fitting place for such fair guests as
ye, still ye are welcome!"

"Thanks, good Yarl Hahkon. We have come to
Tredalund, hearing of thy arrival. Where is thy
kinsman?"

"May be he feared thy cats. It would not be the
only time thy maidens and thy kittens have scared a
Northern yarl!"

"Ah, Hahkon! That was many years ago; thou
wert a stripling then, and now thou art a stalwart son
of Thor. Lead me and my maidens to thy bower,
Hahkon, and let the steeds be fed. Ladies there are
none, I trow. Well, never mind, I know the place
and we shall manage. Alas, poor Brenda! she and
my mother died the self-same year."

"So please you, ladies, I will lead the way. My
house is in disorder, as I fear; but such as it is, be
welcome! I only came home yesterday, and found
the nest was full. Now the strange bird has flown, I
seem more strange than he! Could I but find
attendants fitting to your need, I should not so much
mind. This is the bower; here the ladies' hall;
yonder are various chambers leading from the hall,
and this is where I sleep. But deign to sit awhile, and
I will find some women somewhere to attend you."

"Thanks, my good Hahkon, we can help ourselves.
Now, maidens, bustle and get all things well in order.
I dine to-day in hall, and ye my maidens must fill the
warriors' horns."

"Pray, canst thou tell me, Fulda, whether there
lives a shipman now near this, called Ochthere?
I bring an offer from King Alfred to take him back
with me. First I must find him out."

"He has his home at Lundaberg, but now I know he is absent cruising ; he will be back in spring."

"Then I must winter here in Tredalund."

"Now, Hahkon, that's the point ; sit down by me a while. The girls are running wild to get yon hall in order. They will show the servants what to do. We are alone. Now tell me all about thy plans ? How can I aid thee ? Tell me about Halfdan. They said that he was killed at Yeorvik, or at some such place in England."

"My plans, dear lady, are, I fear, but simple. I am a prisoner to the great King Alfred, who kindly gives me freedom on my word to come back to his service when I have found this Ochthere."

"What bond has Alfred that thou wilt return ?"

"My foster-brother Orm remains as hostage."

"Ah ! that looks bad ; that looks like going back."

"And if Orm were not there, would not my honour force me to return ? You see, I promised."

"That all depends. Is this King Alfred Christian ?"

"He is most thoroughly."

"In that case a mere promise is not binding. How hast thou sworn, upon the sword or ring ?"

"On neither, lady ; but my honour is bound to keep my faith, the more so as he trusted me."

"There is no faith with Christians. Never mind ; it may be well for thee to go again and see this King of England."

"I must, on Orm's account."

"Oh, he is far too much a viking is friend Orm, not to escape when proper time approaches. But never mind him now. Tell me thy plans."

Then very rapidly Hahkon related his adventures in England, the wedding with Thordisa, the mock duel with Grimm, the various battles fought on English ground, the prowess of King Halfdan, his own capture by King Alfred, and his kindness. Only no word said he of Alfred's sisters, or the Christian thoughts with which he (Hahkon) had of late been filled.

"H'm, this is awkward," said the Lady Fulda. "Halfdan still living! But I am most sure we heard that he was killed."

"That was Yarl Hubba's brother, who also was called Halfdan. He fell at York with many Danish lords. Harald may choose to take the Northern crown, and leave Upsala to his father. He is not liked, and should the merry king return, there would be work enough! Freydisa deems him dead!"

"Then it were best to tell her that her husband is alive. Her son is very good to her, men say. As for thy kinsman, I would hasten to the king and say the nithing fled when thou didst come in sight. I think there can be not the slightest question he gives thee back thy own. However, I will see him first before thou comest to Framness. I may be of use. Lend me a dragon and a trusty crew, and I will do my best. What does King Alfred want with Ochthere?"

"He wants to know the shape of Scandinavia, besides some other matters for his people, who are most foully ignorant."

"Does he intend a viking raid upon our northern coast?"

"Alas, poor king! he cannot hold his own, much less attempt fresh conquests. The Danes devour the land; two years ago there was a famine, because they

ate up everything. They kept the food, of course, and women and children starved throughout the land of England!"

"Well, they were Christians, so after all perhaps it was as well! Now, about Orm? I think the best would be to send a ship, with news of some kind, to King Alfred. The absence of this Ochthere would be a fair excuse. Then let this messenger tell Orm in private to escape! Orm is as shrewd as thou, perhaps more cunning. I think he may be trusted. Then mark me, Hahkon, Halfdan comes not back to Sweden any more. Of that I am convinced. I have my reasons, and I know they are good. His days are numbered. But before we hear that he is really dead Harald must rule in Norway. Who shall reign in Upsala?"

"That I shall never guess."

"Well, shall I tell thee, Hahkon?"

"Yes, if thou wilt."

"Hahkon, the young Sea-Eagle!"

She rose as she said this, and left him in the trance produced by her strange answer. He rubbed his eyes. Was he asleep or not? Had Fulda really spoken, or was it all a dream? How had she vanished? Where were all her train. Very much puzzled was friend Hahkon, who looked not over clever, gazing about him very much in doubt, half scared and sore perplexed.

He stalked into the hall, where many men still slept. He called the steward, a new man, whose face he much disliked, and bade him straight prepare the mid-day meal, by giving to the cooks and kitchen helps the food required to dine.

"How many will sit down, sir Yarl. Not all those

fellows yonder, who swilled more mead last night than good Yarl Thorkell's household wanted in a year."

"Look here, my friend!" said Hahkon. "I command here now, so let me have no growling, or I'll treat thee as the Christians treat each other. I'll hang thee right straight off."

"Good my lord Yarl!"

"Call me not good, my friend! Just now thou saidst that Thorkell was so good! If he be good, then am I bitter bad, and thy poor case is hopeless. The ladies dine in hall. I think there are some twenty girls in all, besides the Lady Fulda. Of men, about a hundred, or possibly some more; say fifty more, a hundred and fifty men. No stinting, friend! See there be mead enough, wine for the chiefs and captains, and for the Lady Fulda. Get thee gone!"

Left to himself the conflict was full grim. Alfred, Orm, honour, England, Christianity, Eadburga, and on the other side a crown! He paced the hall, uncertain what to do.

Then calling to his side Yarl Thorgills, he begged him to hold himself in readiness to sail to Framness, with the vala, and wait there her return, a charge which Thorgills gladly undertook. The men would be delighted with the task, he said, for Fulda of the "Stormy Ness" was very popular with all men, women, and children through those parts.

The mid-day meal passed off as usual in the North. Much laughter was caused by Fulda's girls acting as cup-bearers to Hahkon's friends. The mead was sweeter than it ever was before, while the bright colour of their flowing locks lent a far richer golden glow to the foam on the champions' horns. The

evening saw them sailing into the burning west, where the golden ship of heaven sank in a sea of gold.

And when the ship was lost to view, swallowed up in glowing fire with its still more glowing freight, they turned them back to Hahkon's hall, which had become as gloomy by the absence of Fulda as it had suddenly brightened under the influence of Hahkon's return.

But there was no heart there that could resist the cheering influence of Hahkon's presence. The band had no time for gloom, for he led them into mimic battles, showed them how men fought at Luna (he never said Rome now), and how they fought at York. He drew them up in wedges, and practised the line and ring. He made them in the latter form build the shield vault or dome, concealing all the warriors under the arched roof. The second morning after Fulda left, he sent for the steward, to give him orders concerning the mid-day meal, but heard that, horrified with all the waste (for so he called it) in the hall, he had mounted his horse, and fled in terror.

At last the time for the vala's return arrived. The watchman on the beacon hill saw the ship rise in the offing, and sounded his signal horn. This was taken up by the next in turn, and so on until it reached the hall. Then all the champions hurried forth to meet her and her train. They lined the little bay, and each vied with the other to be the first to see her on the deck. But soon the news was spread that other ships had come, some six or seven sail.

Quickly the order flew "to arms," and it is difficult for those who live in peaceful times to realise how

rapidly the arms were seized by those trained hands. Helmets replaced the crested cap. Iron shirts of thick chain mail covered the dark blue tunic, and the richly decorated sheath hung from the shining belt glowing in gems and gold, or merely in gilt and polished leather, according to the rank and standing of the wearer. Spears gleamed and bucklers glowed. But to be well prepared for friends as well as foes, Hahkon gave orders for a sumptuous feast. The board in hall was spread with dainty fare, and for such as could not dine in hall similar boards were fixed for the larger crowd. It was well that the steward had escaped so soon, or else the sight of such stupendous waste had killed him on the spot.

Meanwhile the ships drew nearer. Six in all, fine well-manned dragons, with the small blue flag bearing the ring of gold, which showed that they were led by one of Sweden's kings.

Hahkon drew up his men in battle order. First the thralls, or bondsmen, with shields, then champions with their deadly double axes, then the spears in line. Six belted yarls were there, with gold bands round their helms. A band of fishers from the villages around had come that morning to see Hahkon, because in many places it was scarce believed that the news could be true, and he was really back again. These men he ordered to man the boats belonging to the dragons in the bay, and pull towards the strangers unarmed, as messengers of peace.

The men obeyed right gladly, and soon they rowed up to the various ships, greeting them from Yarl Hahkon. The largest, as was ordered, rowed to the royal ship, a noble dragon carved and richly gilt.

Then from the ship descended such a form as Scandinavia only could produce, but never saw before. Taller than all the champions in his train, he towered above them like a pine above the smaller forest trees. Yet he was like the oak for strength and breadth, and sturdiness of limb. He wore a kingly helm, that is, a cap of stout and hardened leather, with gold band, surmounted by small half lozenges of gold, and further joined to two half hoops of gold, crossing each other at the point above the centre of the whole. He wore the deep blue tunic and the golden belt of Sweden's ancient kings. But the most golden part about him was his hair, which rolled in massive waves down to his waist. For this men called him Harald Hárfga, or Harald with the fair hair. His beard was like his hair, without a trace of brown. Never was mortal seen so godlike in his form.

Over the side he stepped, some yarls came with him to the boat, and told the fishermen to go on board their ship, for they must row their king. It was too great an honour for men of so low estate to row so great a king!

The fishermen objected. They had received commands to row to the ships and back, and must obey their yarl. The nobles were indignant, and would have drawn their swords to slay these fishermen who dared to give them laws! But Harald said in a firm commanding voice, "Let be; return ye to the ship. I make these fishers freemen, so I have not been rowed by thralls."

The men were much astonished, but rowed the king to land. As soon as Harald saw the men in arms drawn up upon the beach, he smiled, and said, "Ho, master yarl! in arms against thy king? This

must be seen to!" But Hahkon running down to meet him, cried: "Welcome, lord King. If it please thee to repose with us a while, I pray thee to accept our hospitality!" Then turning to the men at arms, he cried, "My friends, salute the king!" Instantly axe and brand and spear were lowered from the champions' shoulders, and made to touch the ground.

"These are thy men, or rather Halfdan's, for whom thou reignest over us at Upsala."

Then Harald held his hand to Hahkon, who led him to the hall at Tredalund.

"Thou art a sturdy champion," said Harald, "and faithful to my father. Lives he, then?"

"I saw him some months since, alive and well. They talk of making him an English king, to rule some part of England, over Swedes and Danes. But he, methinks, would much prefer his Framness to all the rain and fogs of chilly England."

"Well, it is all his own. I never would oppose my father. In Norway, where I was elected king, they clamour for me. Is that thy hall? It is a noble place."

The giant with the golden locks stood on the eminence on which the hall was built, and watched his men arrive. When they were all on shore, Yarl Hahkon's men shouted "Hurrah for Harald! Hurrah for the Golden King." Then Fulda and her train arrived, and at a gesture from the king, entered the spacious hall. Hahkon and Harald followed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW HAKON RECEIVED NEWS FROM THE WEST
SAXONS.

A SCANDINAVIAN viking's life was in general a succession of battles and feasts, varied by the religious observances required by the priesthood, consisting chiefly of sacrifice and song. They had few amusements beyond the play of arms, but their literary culture was not so low as men are nowadays inclined to think. They could carve the ancient letters of our race, called runes, on birch-tree staves, they could compose poetry, and were supposed to have all the sacred doctrines of their creed by heart. These doctrines had been handed down from very remote antiquity in the form of poems easily committed to memory, and sung on all occasions of solemnity by the priests and priestesses, who (especially the latter) were greatly venerated. The sagas and qvidas, or legends and lays, were sung by the skalds, who were necessary officers in all great households.

On the occasion of the grand reception of Harald by Hahkon, the king occupied the chief seat on the high bank, Hahkon sat at his left hand, while Fulda sat at his right. The king's champions were seated in regular gradation from the dais to the two ends of the hall, while on the opposite side, along the southern wall, the warriors of the household ranged. In the

centre, by the fire, was a group of cooks and the skalds.

One of the longest productions of the Northern muse amongst the champions of Odin is the celebrated Death-lay of Ragnar Lodbrok, and an extraordinary production it is, giving us a vivid account of manners and customs of that time. This was sung, from beginning to end, by Hahkon's skalds.

Our business, however, is with the conversation between the giant king and our hero, which turned upon the military exploits of the Danes in England. Harald seemed heartily glad to hear that his father was still alive and fighting, and manifested great pride in the "old king," as he called him.

"I never should have worn his crown, Hahkon, if I had not been certain of his death; and thou canst believe me, I am more glad of thy news than any other thou canst give me."

"Thou art to be king of Norway?"

"So men say. They have elected me, but I cannot leave the Swedes ungoverned!"

"Sir King, knowest thou Yarl Gunther?"

"What! him who took the bark that bore Thordisa? Yes, I knew him when alive."

"How! Is he dead?"

"Yes; Thordisa's sister had a husband, one of the East Dane kings, and when he heard this outrage had been done, he sailed to Gunthervik in twenty dragons. He put Yarl Gunther to the sword together with his sons, sowed the whole land with salt, and sailed away revenged!"

"But thou, as king of Norway, couldst thou permit this? Or didst thou nothing in it?"

"My dear friend Hahkon! then I was not king

of Norway! Nor am I yet, nor should I have accepted the offer of the crown which they now make me, had I not felt a duty to my father to wear the crown for him. Now that he lives, I know that I am free to take or leave the crown of Norway. And as I mean to take it I am more thankful for thy tidings than I can fitly say."

"When wilt thou leave for Norway, Harald?" asked the vala.

"Fair lady, that depends; I have no friend to ease me here in Sweden. It is no joke to wear a crown like mine. These times are stirring, and the warlike throng of yarls about the throne seek only war. I love war, too, I hope! I am no nithing king to sigh for peace; I love war upon the noble scale when a whole people fights the nation's cause. But all these petty squabbles I abhor, where one yarl thus must cut his neighbour's throat about some point of honour. It must be so to some extent, but if I ever should be king, I'll stop some of this fooling there in Norway."

This speech was received with very great disfavour: not a sound was heard, and that ominous silence was in those days something like a *hiss* in modern times. The king saw the displeasure of his lords, and a very unpleasant expression overspread his manly countenance. It spoke of *will*, iron will, inflexible, unapproachable; the man was all will. There was power in the glance that showed he could and would subdue the minds of others and bend them to his own. He said no more upon the subject, he did not frown or "glare about him like a fiend," but *smiled*. That smile told more than chapters we could write. He turned to Hahkon and the look was gone. The

courteous king was there conversing with his yarl, and nothing more.

“Now tell me, Hahkon, how came it that the very first thing thou shouldst do, on thy return to Sweden, should be to act against my rule and government? Ha! Tell me that.”

“I, my lord King! I never dreamt of such a thing. If I have angered thee in any way, name thou a champion to decide the case by arms for thee, leaving the issue to the gods!”

“Ha, ha, ha! What! Always fighting! Say I not well? it is a weary task to govern Northern yarls. Nay, what I mean is this. I did confer thy yarldom on thy kinsman, Thorkell, thinking he had been wronged. A yarl of mine found him among some Finns, with a thick collar hung about his neck. Thinking my father and thou also dead, I ventured to remove the collar. And knowing that Yarl Attlé Sigurdson intended him to be his heir, I thought he must be fitting to succeed that noble yarl and thee, his son. Why hast thou dispossessed him?”

“I never dispossessed him. At my approach the nithing ran away, and never stopped to ask me whether I came to take the place or not.”

“Ha, ha, ha! He ran away; the nithing!”

“But,” interrupted Fulda, “he knew thou didst but give this place to him thinking the owner slain. *He* knew full well thou wouldest not dispossess our yarl for such a thing as he! Our yarl was owned as such by Attlé Sigurdson and King Halfdan in full Ting. Thorkell was only to succeed failing our yarl; who does not fail, thank Odin!”

“Well argued, lovely vala. Before thy glowing words I have no speech. Thou hast thy will of me.

In thy most gentle hands I am a puppet, and thou canst do with me just as it pleases thee. Well, Hahkon, here thou art. Now listen to my plan. Thou art my father's friend. Thou bringest us the good tidings that he is safe and well. Thou art the son of Attlé Sigurdson, and all men love thee for thine own good deeds. I want to go to Norway. Thou shalt hold the crown in charge for Halfdan until he comes again to rule his men himself. The yarls would love thee better than they ever did or could love me. Is it a bargain?"

"King Harald, it is much thou offerest. Nor I nor thou can of ourselves decide. I ask thee to propose it to the Ting, and if the tingsmen wish it, then I must accept. But remember, I have no right to reign; I am not of the gods, only a simple yarl, and there are thousands more in Norway and in Sweden who would be sooner chosen by Sweden's men in Ting."

"Well; let it be so," said the fair-haired king; "I care not how I get my will so that I have it, and this thing I mean to have!"

At last the skald's song was ended. Then Fulda and her maids sang an enchanting lay so weird, so wild and wonderful, that all our efforts to translate, or even understand it, have proved vain. After this lay she retired with her maidens, and left the hall to the ruder occupants, who seemed much more in keeping with the grim state around. The plan suggested by the king was well discussed by all the champions present, who seemed to think it most advisable.

A whole week was spent in this way; hunting, hawking, martial exercises, filling up the space

between. Then with kind expressions of courtesy the fair-haired king returned to winter in his hall at Framness.

The winter passed without much incident; the warriors only wondered why Hahkon, having all that heart could wish, should be so mournful and so sad. They could not see his heart! Three grave and serious questions troubled the champion's soul. First of the three came Orm. How was his noble brother, whom he had loved so dearly from a child? To be deprived of Orm was cruelty to Hahkon. No one could fill Orm's place. Next came the question of the gentle English ladies, sisters of Alfred's queen. He wondered much what would become of them? It seemed to him such madness in King Alfred to make terms with the foe already in the country! "He should cut us down, and never dream of peace while one Dane lived in England!" Then came the deepest thought of all. The Christian faith! Was it a sham or not?

He now had seen how Christians *lived the faith*, and it had been most lovely in his eyes. That noble king, worn with a strange disease, harassed by foes all round, uncertain of his people, poor and without allies, had yet shown Hahkon happiness. The first fair glimpse of happiness he ever had was in King Alfred's court! Oh, how he loved that pale and haggard face, worn old before its time by cares more grave than ever earthly king had borne before, and yet how steadfast, true, and holy was the light that lit that face at times!

The other face, that of the gentle Eadburga, was lovely too, but in another way. He could not separate them. When he thought of one, the other

came, and with them came the glorious solemn chant beginning :

“Glorify the great God, all ye lands,”

which kept ringing in his ears day and night.

Then he envied Orm his imprisonment, since it enabled him to be near such sights and such sounds as could only be heard and seen (Hahkon thought) in the house of Alfred.

Such musings gave him a perplexed and preoccupied air, little befitting the countenance of a stern champion of Odin, whose every other thought should be of violence ! And the spring found him pale and careworn.

Then came the summons. Heralds were despatched all over the country to call the warriors together, and Hahkon found himself summoned to appear to meet his equals in the “All-ting,” or general assembly to debate questions of importance to the whole nation. He with his yarls and freemen under him serving, were all cited to appear on the first day of the feast of Eostra, goddess of the spring, to whom the customary sacrifices were to be made.

True to his oath of fealty to Halfdan, Hahkon prepared to obey his son’s mandate issued in the old king’s name. And there was work at scouring shields and helmet-rings, and ornaments of gold and bronze. Eagles’ wings were to be obtained and fixed to the helmets, fresh gold fringe and other ornaments were to be added to the dress ; in short, everybody was full of occupation, when one day a strange sail was reported coming into the bay. Instant preparations were made to send a ship to meet her and demand her errand at Tredalund. Hahkon himself

was on board at the helm. And who can paint his feelings, partly of joy at the sight, partly of anxiety for others, when he recognised Orm's face earnestly watching for him. The two ships ranged alongside. In "no time" Hahkon was on board with his hand firmly locked in that of his foster-brother.

"Why, man! What is this? Escaped? How? why? What of the king? how is the—that is, how are the ladies of the good king's house? What of the war? Out with it."

"Thy questions come thick and fast; give me time, friend, to answer. I have been set free by act of war, released by Halfdan, who, hearing that thou wast taken, came down upon Alfred with a perfect cloud of Swedes and Norwegians. Alfred, utterly defeated, is forced to fly, no man knows whither. All his court is scattered; where he is his friends themselves cannot even guess. Burrhed was slain some time ago, and Ingvar has made one of his jarls the king of Mercia. East Anglia is Danish. In fact, the land was divided between the Danes and Alfred. Now he has fled; swallowed alive, men say, in some strange place in Kent; I know not where he is, but this I know, that when my captor fled, I by the rules of war was free. Halfdan is coming in the summer, and so the English trip is over. England is Denmark. Ragnar is avenged!"

"How is it with that pensive churchman, Asser? I like him hugely. Is he safe?"

"I cannot tell thee, Hahkon. Tell me now thy news."

Then Hahkon told him everything that had taken place, even to the terrible vengeance taken on Yarl Gunther for the death of Thordisa.

Said Orm, "That should have been thy work! However, it is over, and regrets are vain."

"I do not much regret it," answered Hahkon, "and, as thou sayest, it is over. Now wilt thou come with me to the Ting? There will be much to do. Thy tidings are of public interest, I think it fitting that thou shouldst go."

"Yes, I will go. I long to see this fair-haired monster. If he gives thee or lends thee such a crown — who knows? he may have luck in store for me."

"I have some measures to propose, and want my friends around me, Orm, so I am very glad that thou wilt come."

And so they came ashore happy as those can be who know the value of true friendship.

The Ting was not held upon Belé's grave, but in the plain where the stones mark (like those on Salisbury plain) the meeting place of Northern heroes. Harald looked splendid as he stood upon the centre stone after the sacrifice, and then he made this wonderful address, which he repeated afterwards in Norway. Remember, he knew nothing of the Christian faith, which had not yet penetrated into Scandinavia.

"Friends, yarls, and freemen! I have made my last attempt to please the gods by sacrifice; I do so now no more! These gods are nonsense! Show me the God who has made heaven and earth, and I will worship him!"

This was so fully in agreement with the grand "*Jubilate*" that rang so constantly in Hahkon's ears, that he exclaimed involuntarily:

"Be ye sure that the Lord He is God;
It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves."

Harald stopped. It was so unusual a thing to be interrupted that he knew not what to do. By law no one could be interrupted except by the king, and to interrupt *him* ! It should, it ought to be punished with death. But then Hahkon was too important a yarl to be dealt with so. Therefore, Harald resolved to take no notice of the interruption ; but the words rang in his ears all the same, and he never forgot them.

Then came the proposal that Hahkon should hold the crown for Halfdan, of whom he had brought such good news, whose personal friend and confidential adviser he had been. This was received with universal applause, and the delight on hearing of the safety of Halfdan was only equalled by the pleasure with which the tingsmen heard of Harald's resolution to go to Norway. The people admired him and acknowledged his genius, but he was too tyrannical for the Swedes, and was therefore far from popular. They adored Halfdan, and if he had not come back the majority of his yarls would certainly have gone to England to share his fortunes or avenge his fall ; first, however, having deposed his son. His last speech was greatly disliked ; Hahkon's interruption was unheard by most, and, of course, not understood by the small minority who heard it.

Hahkon addressed them in a modest speech, thanking them for honouring him by electing him as formal representative of the absent king. He reminded them, that not being of Odin's blood, he could never really assume the regal function, and that, therefore, he would lay down whatever appearance of authority was conferred upon him on the return of the king himself.

He then stated that he intended to go to England as soon as Halfdan returned, and in that case to make over Tredalund to his foster-brother Orm, to whom he begged the Ting to grant the rank of yarl, so that he might succeed him worthily as Yarl of Tredalund.

Orm was unprepared for this and for the deafening applause with which it was received. He tried to answer, but his heart was so full that he could not speak.

Harald caught the idea. It was one of which he approved in every way. "Thou art right, Yarl Hahkon; we have overlooked friend Orm, who has always played the part of shield-holder to thee. It is right and fitting that this state of things should cease, and very right and very fitting that the matter comes from thee. Before I leave for Norway, I myself will hold the ceremony in my father's name, and see him belted yarl before I go. Hahkon must be his witness, and we shall ask the Lady Fulda of the 'Stormy Ness' to belt him. Ha!"

This speech was well received, and other matters of importance were disposed of. On account of the absence of Fulda, the investiture was postponed until she could be sent for and arrive. Three war-ships were despatched, one for her and her maidens, and the other two for the purpose of defence.

The time, however, passed away, and the Lady Fulda came with great delight to do a kindness for Hahkon's brother, Orm. The ceremony took place in the hall at Framness; and the grand belt, glittering with gold and gems, was the gift of fair King Harald.

When these things were done, a special Ting was called, at which King Harald placed the crown in Hahkon's hands, not on his head, and bade him

hold it for the good King Halfdan until he should return ; he swore him on his sword to yield it up again to Halfdan, never to make it his, or think of it but as a sacred trust reposed by Sweden's yarls. He then admonished the yarls, bidding them give that fealty to Hahkon, representing Halfdan, that they would render the king himself were he there. After a somewhat awkward speech he bade the yarls farewell, leaving our friend in charge.

Full well did Hahkon justify the confidence that Harald had reposed in him. And everybody said he was far better fitted for a king than the fair-haired tyrant Harald.

Summer passed, and still no Halfdan came. The storms of autumn had begun to rave before he reached the North. Great was his joy to find Yarl Hahkon there, and Harald gone to Norway.

"They told me, Hahkon, that my hopeful son had seized my crown, and meant to seize on me, if ever I dared swim in Swedish waters. But I have come prepared to hold my own, because I think it shame to have so little of a king as not to rule one's household. I thank thee for thy care. Was it thy design or that of the merry witch, Dame Fulda ? Freydisa says the latter."

Hahkon now told the king how Thorkell had been recalled by Harald, and how he fled away at Hahkon's bare approach. Halfdan was hugely displeased at the whole story of Thorkell's recall, as it seemed so completely to set his wishes at defiance. After a pause he asked of Hahkon what news there was of old Yarl Grimm's granddaughter.

"I never saw her, save that time that she, her mother, and Yarl Grimm rode past my door. That

was the only time. I wonder now how the report that I had promised her to wed her could ever have arisen."

"We must ask the Queen Freydisa. She must see thee, Hahkon, now that I am back. She took it firmly in her head that thou didst seize the crown to wrong me of my own."

Ever since his residence at Framness, Hahkon had rarely seen Freydisa. She seemed to shun him, and Hahkon was too proud a man to force himself on her. But now the king had come, and her great joy in him opened her heart to all. The flight of time had told on Queen Freydisa, and left upon her furrowed brow sad traces of what had passed within. Halfdan was far less changed than she, in fact the stirring scenes on flood and field during the English war had lent him youth again.

He entered gladly where the lady sat surrounded by her maidens, and brought Yarl Hahkon with him. She rose to greet the king, but changed her mien on seeing Hahkon. The king observed the change, and gaily asked her why she looked so glum.

"Dear King and lord," exclaimed the noble lady, "a friend of thine should be most welcome to thy wife. I grieve that thou shouldst bring me one whom I cannot regard with eyes of favour."

"Then, by Thor's mallet, this is scant courtesy! Hahkon deserves our love if ever man deserved it. Twice he has saved my life. His name has raised the name of Swedish warriors above the champions of the North. The fierce blood-thirsty Danes have gained a cruel fame for other viking lands! Yes. I am no puling maiden, but when I think of Danish butchery I shudder. Now Hahkon has done much to serve

the cause of Odin. He showed the English that a Scandinavian chief may be a brave man, although no cruel beast. He showed Yarl Hubba what was to be done by force combined with judgment."

"Then," cried the queen, "I can be silent no longer. He is a false and perjured yarl. To stout Grimm's grandchild he did plight his troth, and then abandoned her for Ragnar's daughter. Then, as if this were not base enough, he slays Yarl Grimm in combat, so that his deed should be for ever hid. But no; it shall not be. I, as a queen in Sweden, will not receive a nithing."

During this speech Hahkon grew red and pale by turns. Halfdan frowned and cried, "Now we shall sift this matter. I fear me much, my lady, that thou hast been the cause of more unhappiness than I can well make good. Hahkon is certainly the dearest friend I have. It is not meet thou shouldst abuse him thus. But as this is a public matter, I shall command a trial so that the guilt or innocence of one who guarded for me Sweden's crown during my absence shall be established in the eyes of witnesses. Art thou willing, Hahkon, to have thy conduct proved?"

"Most willing and most ready. Does thy queen accuse me?"

"Certainly. Some yarl will speak for her upon the Ting, but she is thy accuser."

"Hold!" cried Freydisa. "It were public shame to prove the man thou trustedst such a knave. Send thou to Barnangen, where Thorkell lives with Heckla his wife."

"Ha!" exclaimed Halfdan, in a towering rage. "He whom I banished, wed with Yarl Grimm's

daughter? By whose permission did the wretch return?"

"Partly at my request, partly by Harald's wish. I felt that when the girl was slighted, she would find no husband in the North. The land at Tredalund was going to decay, and so I thought the better way would be, believing Hahkon slain, to let the heir of Tredalund return, re-enter on his land, and take the girl to wife."

"Wife, this has never been thy plan. It is so much unlike thee. Thou hast ever been a good and loving wife, always obedient to my slightest wish; and now I find my judgment set at nought, my plans all thwarted, and my will despised! No; I fear thou art right. A public trial would be bad for us, however good for Hahkon. Tell me, friend, where was thy kinsman when thou didst return?"

"I saw him not; he fled at my approach, and now is living at Barnangen, which formerly belonged to Grimm. May I reply to Queen Freydisa's charge?"

"Say what thou wilt, and freely."

"Dear lady; in my life I never told a lie. Thou mayest believe me when I tell thee that I never saw the daughter of Yarl Grimm for longer than sufficed to greet her as she sat on horseback. I sent a groom with Heckla and her mother to lead them to the bower. I never saw her since, never saw her before, and that she will confirm unless she be as false as thou wouldst have men think I am. I did not slay Yarl Grimm. Some words thy husband used caused me to charge Grimm with the lie which has been forged against me. But I learnt in time that he had never thought such thing of me; he utterly disclaimed

the lie before the yarls and kings ; thy husband saw the trial ! ”

“ What ! Halfdan, didst thou hear old Grimm declare he never heard such promise made by Hahkon ? ”

“ Most certainly ; and so I thought it best to let the matter drop as piece of idle gossip amongst thy waiting women. Now it seems more serious, and I will know the reason why thou, so good, so gentle, and so wise, should persecute our Hahkon in this way. I shame me that the house of Belé should have so foul a spot.”

“ Now hear me, Halfdan. Heckla’s mother, Yarl Grimm’s daughter, is here in bower with me. She has been very ill for many months. She loved not Thorkell, hated Tredalund, and so remained at Framness. I must say I never spoke with Heckla on this matter. I did not love her much ; but with the mother I have frequently conversed, and she it is who told me of the deed with which I charge Yarl Hahkon.”

“ Let us see this woman,” said the king, in tones that showed he meant it. “ Lead us to her straight ; no servants, and no nonsense. I must go to her at once unless she can come hither.”

“ That I will learn at once,” exclaimed the queen, much moved, and left the chamber. Hahkon and Halfdan paced the room together. It seemed very long before the queen returned, although in point of fact not more than half an hour. Then she came back, and with her came two maidens leading a woman in. She seemed much bowed in body and in mind. A chair was standing near, and Halfdan bade her sit. Then chairs were placed about her for Halfdan, Hahkon, and the queen.

"Why hast thou spread these lies about Yarl Hahkon? Thy father Grimm assured the Ting in public, before the Swedes and Danes in England, that he had never known of such a promise made by Hahkon. Tell me the reason of this wicked lie, or it shall be a matter for the Ting, and thou shalt be examined publicly, publicly punished ; and thy daughter too, whose name is more concerned."

"My daughter," said the woman, "cares little for thy threats. A knife will always stop thy punishment. Why should we suffer punishment when with a single blow we can escape thy worst?" Here she produced the small curved knife worn by the Danes and Saxons, and would have plunged it in her heart, but Hahkon seized her hand and wrenched the knife away.

"Thy daughter shall not escape me," said the king. "I shall myself sail over to Tredalund, and thence ride on to Barnangen. Her nithing husband stands within the law, and if I do not hear the whole vile plot from thee, I swear by Thor to put the law in force, both against him and her. I am unwilling to be very harsh because of Heckla's children; but I will be obeyed, and when the moment comes that proves this falsehood to have been bred by her, thou canst be sure her punishment and thine shall be *the scourge in public.*"

There was but little in the words; they might have been employed by any man, but Halfdan's tone had something in it that neither man nor woman could resist.

The wretched woman hesitated. Then she said, "Once thou forgavest my poor father, Hahkon, gave him gold to free us from our debts. He said it was a deed nobler than those the very gods had done. He

said thou wert a demi-god that had descended upon earth, a thing to worship and to love. And Heckla thought it would be bliss untold to be the bride of such a man as thou. Grimm came to see thee at my urgent wish. I thought, couldst thou see Heckla thou wouldest find her very fair, and make her the yarl's wife of Tredalund. Now when thou sawest Heckla and myself thou wert as cool and indifferent as though we had been peasants. Not a look of admiration didst thou cast at her who was the fairest maid in Sweden. That cut me to the heart ; my plan was almost spoilt. But still I thought thou wouldest return and see us in thy home. No ! thy long war-ship had more charms for thee than my glorious daughter ! Monster, not man ! Then I thought if thou shouldst hear that she had set her heart on thee, the same strange spirit that led thee then to pay our debts might urge thee on to wed her, and so I told this lady there was cause to think we had thy promise for the match. That is the story; now do what thou wilt, sir King, as I have injured Hahkon."

Halfdan looked very grim, but never spoke.

Freydisa started back in horror from the woman whom she had long protected with her love. "Thou wretch !" she cried ; "there is no word for thee. Nithing is used for men, but never man was half so base as thou."

"Gently, fair lady," said Hahkon. "We must always, when we judge, consider all the circumstances. Now, when Yarl Grimm took Thorkell's part against me, they were in abject fear of slavery. Fear is the mother of all vice, and if I am not vicious, it is because I never knew the feeling men call fear. This poor woman was a slave to fear, and that has caused this woe.

The girl was innocent, and so was Grimm, at least of slander in this matter. When he was really guilty he confessed his guilt, and freely I forgave him. I now forgive his daughter. If the Lady Freydisa will only kindly own that she was wrong in judging me, I shall be satisfied. Clear my name in both your hearts, and that is all I ask. As for this poor woman, her own heart must punish her so strongly, that I have no more to say than that if my free forgiveness soothe her mind at all, she has it."

Halfdan shook his head doubtfully.

"The case is very easy, good sir King," said Hahkon, laughing. "Men cannot doubt my word, because I have so often tried the argument of axe and blade, that they have stamped me truthful. A liar is a coward. I am no coward, therefore am no liar. I think, King Halfdan, I have done enough to have the right of pardoning a woman."

"Hahkon is right," said Freydisa at last. "It is consistent with his former act, when he forgave Yarl Grimm. Besides, we shall avoid by his good deed the shame of public action. But I am sore deceived. I cannot bear to think of how I hated Hahkon! What shall we do with her?"

"I think," said Hahkon, "though she says she hates the name of Tredalund, I think she ought to go there, or to Heckla. Orm would receive her. He knows little and cares less about such woman prattle, and she might lead the bower."

"Better she goes to Barnangen; there she is with her child and far removed from all our yarls and men. Tell me," said Halfdan, "whither wilt thou go?"

"To go to Tredalund would be too much," replied Grimm's daughter. "It will be better that I should go

to Barnangen. There is my daughter's home, there must I be. Her husband is a nithing and a knave, but that we knew before she wedded him, and he will be no worse if I am in the house. I will go thither, if I have a choice."

Then it was settled that a bark of Hahkon's should carry her to Tredalund; thence the men had orders to see her safely on to Barnangen. She fell at Hahkon's feet, and poured her soul out in her thankfulness; she vowed to Var for ever to abandon falsehood's ways, and live a life of truth. The one lie of her life had cost her agony beyond what we may know. Her pride and vanity had caused the ruin of her house, just saved from fall by Hahkon, whom she nearly ruined too. But his forgiveness broke the stubborn spirit, and cured her of her faults. Freydisa said, as this poor creature left:

"Hahkon, either thou art more or less than man! Women, they say, are gentle, but I could never have forgiven wrong like that to me!"

"Dear Queen and lady, vengeance never satisfies. That I have seen in England. Ragnar was foully slain. That's true enough, but he was only one. To satisfy the vengeance of his sons ten thousand English men at arms were slain, four English kingdoms desolated, countless women and children slain, and tortured in the fiercest way. One king was slain in torture, singing praise to God the while, ten more were killed in battle. The noble Alfred, whom I saw myself happy and good, seeking his country's weal, is now a wanderer and a fugitive! Are the sons of Lodbrok satisfied? Is all this blood enough to wipe out one man's death? No; they are unappeased, and it is not enough! This is a proof

that vengeance, however great a duty it may be, according to the law, does yet not satisfy. Now, I forgave Yarl Grimm, and made a friend. I have forgiven Thorkell, who at least is not my foe, and it is better to forgive this woman too. I find it answer better."

Halfdan at last grew merry as he said : " But that I saw thy vengeance on thy father, I should have much misliked this doctrine."

Quoth Hahkon, " Yes ; thou seest there a case in point. That vengeance made me thirsty, and I longed for more. I mean to go to England, with thy leave, and have some further vengeance. Good my lord, pray give me leave to go."

" No, not this year, good Hahkon. I must go to Norway to my son. He is a rare good lad, but very wilful, very obstinate ! "

And so it was agreed between the friends, that Hahkon should maintain King Halfdan's rule during his absence. Orm, the yarl, remained at Tredalund, with promise that if Hahkon came not back within five years of sailing, he should succeed him as his heir.

Grimm's daughter went to Barnangen once more, and there at last she died.

But messengers arrived from Norway with news that there was serious trouble there. Harald, it seems, turned despot, and despite his father's words, ruled with a rod of iron. He said that what he told the Swedes was true ! Religion was all nonsense, priestcraft but a sham, and till he knew who made the earth and stars, he would have no such rubbish. He was the king, the world should worship him, and all the songs to Odin should be now forgotten !

In vain did Halfdan try to smooth this down.

The more his father talked, the more did Harald rave. Three years the father strove to bend that stubborn will. At last the people, such at least as were too proud to own his iron will as god, left him and sailed to Iceland. Thither they took a wondrous store of ancient history and stories of the gods. These were all treasured up and guarded jealously, and then in after times men wrote them down, and so they live for us.

So it was three years later that King Halfdan came to claim his own in Sweden, and to release Hahkon from his trust. In that time the English had truly suffered the same calamities at the hands of the Danes that the Britons had suffered from them. Alfred was the last king who had made head against them, and he was a fugitive ; none knew save those who had fled with him, the place of his concealment. It had been at last a conflict between the Danes and Alfred, and now their last opponent had disappeared and Ingvar was triumphant.

When Hahkon heard these tidings, his heart seemed very sad. He begged King Halfdan to give him leave to sail to Tredalund, and power to depart at will for England.

Freydisa took a loving leave of him ; she thanked him for his care of Halfdan's state, and begged forgiveness for her doubts of him.

The chronicle now briefly tells us, "This year Hahkon sailed away to Tredalund, where he stopped with Orm, the yarl, two winters."

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW HAKON RETURNED TO ENGLAND.

THE progress of our story brings us again to England. Inch by inch the Danes had gained possession of the island. The monasteries built with so much care had all been burnt. That at Peterborough contained the grandest library that England ever knew, and this the Danes destroyed, so that no book of all that vast collection has remained. Grand churches were overthrown in their insatiate fury, and the altars of Odin for a second time took the place of those of Christian England. From Northumberland to Thanet all was Danish.

The panic which had seized the West Saxons, after some decided successes against the invaders, has never been fully accounted for, nor have the extraordinary flight and utter disappearance of Alfred for so long a time been explained, although referred to by his loving biographer Asser. Certain it is that he suffered frightfully. He was exposed to hardships which would have told upon the most robust of men, and which to his delicate frame and sensitive mind must have been inexpressible torture. It is a dark part of history into which we shall not penetrate, but return to England as Alfred emerged from his obscurity to win deathless fame for himself and the English race.

When the great king thought the time had come

to show his people that their chief still lived, he could not all at once assume the sword and crown.

As long as any of the sons of Lodbrok lived, Alfred lay lost in his obscurity ; but when the last of these, the furious Hubba, fell by the sword of Adun, Earl of Devon, who took the Danish standard called the Raven (worked by Thordisa and her sisters in three days and nights), and routed their army in North Devon, near the Bristol Channel, then Alfred knew the time was come to act. There was a prophecy that while that raven's mystic wings were spread the Danes would be successful. Again the rumour went that when the magic standard was displayed a raven sent by Odin fluttered over it. And when the English saw the living bird flying above the banner, they threw down their arms and fled in all directions.

If this were generally thought in England, we may be led to see how Alfred, fearing loss of men and arms in more such panics, wisely kept aloof until the charm was broken by the standard being lost.

Be this as it may ; before it became known that Hubba had been slain and the weird raven taken, a little island amongst the fens of Somersetshire was chosen by King Alfred as the rallying-point for the new army which he meant to raise. The river Parret flowing past this island reached what we call the Bristol Channel. After the capture by the Earl of Devon of Hubba's fatal flag, one ship of the Danes alone escaped, and that by some bad management, grounded just at the Parret's mouth. The Danes were slaughtered by the people to a man, but it was found that Hubba had been slain. The news flew up the river and came to Alfred's ears in Athelney (so was the island called, meaning the Isle of Princes).

This was formed by vast impenetrable marshes, and two rivers, the Parret and the Thone, at the confluence of which the island stood. The place was inaccessible, excepting at one spot, and there King Alfred made a bridge across the Parret, which was strengthened at each end by towers of earth and clay. The Somersetshire peasants brought him food, and took great pride in having him among them.

The ealdorman or prince commanding in the district received Ethelswitha, Eadburga, and Edith into his well-built hall, which had escaped the notice of the Danes; while from his little island the patient king issued his commands.

As soon as it was known that Alfred lived, the scattered English flocked to see his face; amongst them came the Earl of Devon with the dreaded Danish raven. Enthusiasm knew no bounds when this trophy was displayed. Still it was necessary to be cautious, and not to risk a battle with a large army of Danes. Their main body lay in Wiltshire. It was encamped near Westbury, and thither went our warrior king alone, to watch the foe. Disguised as a skald, or minstrel, and knowing the dialect perfectly, his skill in music gained him admission to all the Danish huts and larger houses of the leaders and yarls. His sweet voice made him welcome, and he could sing the lays of the old faith of Odin. Thus he gained all information that he wanted, and in a few short weeks the fight at Ethendune was fought that raised him to the throne.

But, as a Christian, Alfred could not slay the Danish dwellers in the land as they had slain the English. And when Guthorm, who had been set by Ingvar as king or ruler over the East Angles, now

almost wholly Danish, was brought before him as a prisoner, he made him the proposal to embrace the Christian faith. After deliberation, the Dane consented, and he and thirty chiefs were all baptized at Aulre, near Athelney. Alfred was sponsor, and Guthorm's Christian name was Ethelstan.

The wisdom of this plan lay in obtaining a Danish friend between himself and the fiercer Danes then settled in Northumbria, and though the Christianity was, of course, merely formal, it was at least a link, which he contrived to strengthen.

Twelve years had passed in combat with the Danes between the death of Lodbrok and the fight at Ethendune. It was a splendid victory, and splendidly Alfred used it. Civilisation sprang up, not only amongst the English, but amongst the Danes, who brought on their side fresh vigour from the North into the lazy land. But Alfred learnt that peace in England meant a stupendous navy. All the West Saxon coast lay open. The coasts of Sussex, Kent, and Essex were quite exposed to the fierce viking hosts that swarmed upon the sea.

One day he went to view the coast where Plymouth now is built. A viking dragon came in sight, glowing in the sun. The breeze was light and fair for the harbour. The king was standing on the Hoe, and watching this bark's course, as she seemed nearing land.

"Who has the coast in charge?" he asked of an old thane standing beside him. On the other side there stood a priestly-looking man, with somewhat haggard face, but of a pleasing aspect on the whole. The thane replied, "Earl Eadbreht guards it, and I hope he sees yon viking. He must hurry up his men to meet the crew if they attack us."

"What thinkest thou of yonder craft, friend Asser?" said the king.

"I, my lord King, have very little skill in matters meaning bloodshed. My opinion is of little value. Thane Seeberht surely knows. Indeed, I feel he does."

"Not I, sir priest. How can I tell these craft from one another? A dragon is a dragon, and a merchant craft's a ship."

"Thou seest that she has some thirty oars or more. Most likely one of Hastings' battle ships."

"St. Peter be our aid! I think the priest is right."

"I think so too," said Alfred, "but it is right hard to tell. Descend we to the guard-house, Eadbreht seems asleep. Come, Seeberht, call the train. We will descend together."

The thane then raised his horn and put it to his lips, and blew a merry note. Then there rode up a goodly well-armed train, and in the rear three mounted grooms led three superb black horses. King Alfred touched the mane of one proud steed, and mounted with a graceful bound. The thane was not so rapid, while the churchman was fain to ask the groom to "give him a leg up."

Rapidly they galloped to the beach, and here they found a guard of armed men drawn up to check invasion.

"Is the Thane Eadbreht there?" cried Alfred, in a voice far different from the low and gentle tones in Elswitha's bower, some four or five years back. Here spoke a king accustomed to command, the practised leader conscious of his skill.

The thane was startled. "Can it be the king? I thought he was at Wilton, with the queen. Thank God! I'm ready for him." Then he said aloud, "Who

asks for me? Some leader of the host sent on, maybe, with orders!"

"Never mind me, just now, my friend. If thou art Eadbreht, well, I am glad of it, for thou art at thy post and ready. What is yon craft?"

"A viking craft she seems; most likely one of those picked up by Hastings. She seems inclined to land."

"A glorious vessel, Asser! would such a one were mine. May be the crew will land, and then if they attack us, let us see, the ship may yet be ours, after all."

"It is the king," said Eadbreht to himself; then rushing close to Alfred's side, he bent his knee a moment, as he said, "If the king wants yon ship, we'll make a shift to take her with Alfred looking on."

The men here raised a deafening shout of joy to see their king. Now from the top of this bright dragon's mast there floated a blue flag, on which was worked an eagle. Just as the shout was raised to greet King Alfred, this ensign was run down, and there remained in air, just half-mast high.

Thane Eadbreht looked amazed. Could she have known the king and thus saluted him on landing? What may this mean?

Said Asser, "They are lowering their sail. Me-thinks they will cast anchor. Good my lord, look! there's a boat just coming from her side. Well, that is strange."

"I see it not, sir priest," observed the thane, excitedly, "but maybe thou art right. Call out the 'river guard,' we want more men."

"I think not," said the king; "however, as thou wilt. The Danes are sturdy champions."

"So are we," exclaimed an English spearman

standing by. "We fear no Northmen, we. The king is here!"

Delighted with this speech, Alfred took off a ring from his finger, and with something of the air of a Northern chief giving a bracelet, presented it to the soldier. But the bluff Englishman shook his head. "Let it be, sir King! I cannot wear a thing like that, but when we take yon dragon, and my bearing pleases thee, then order me a new strong steel-bound helmet. This is almost spent."

"That shalt thou have, and more besides. But, friends, the boat draws near; they step on shore. Saints above us, it is Hahkon!"

And putting spurs to his horse, Alfred galloped down to the boat. Down he sprang from the saddle, and in another minute the hand of the Swedish yarl was firmly locked in that of the English king.

"I come, according to my word, to render myself up. I should have come before, but heard that thou wast dead, and England, in the hands of Hubba, was made a Danish province."

"The Christian law requires patience," said the king. "The triumph of the Christians over pagans is not by force of arms, but by the aid of God. Earl Adun, on the northern coast of Devon, was shut up by Hubba in his castle on the rock. The Danes had ravaged Wales, and sought to waste the goodly land of Devon. Adun knew that siege meant death; he had no food to keep his soldiers upon that barren hill. And so one night, in utter desperation, he issued from his hold, slew fierce Hubba in his hut, captured the Raven, and dispersed the Danes, who fled in terror from the conqueror. The victory is the Lord's."

Hahkon was silent for a moment; then he said:

"I do in part believe thy Christian faith, for I have found forgiveness better than revenge. I never understood why, if thy Christ were really powerful, He should permit the sons of Odin to slay the Christians, and possess their land."

"When we were strong," replied the king, "exulting in our strength, and warring for ourselves, the battle went against us. Now we are weak and scattered, our foes possess our land, their name is legion, boundless their strength, but (for there is a but, a very weighty one) 'The Lord is on our side.' The victory of Adun, my own at Ethendune, are the Lord's doing. Glory be to Him!"

"It is a noble thought, King Alfred," Hahkon said, "and I am more and more convinced that the true God is Christ. I would learn more, and hope to profit by thy teachings, and more by thy example. In the meantime, the dragon ship I bring may serve thee as a model for thy fleet."

"A better gift was never yet bestowed," said Alfred. "We are in great want of ships, and yet my people cannot build them properly. This comes at the right time, friend Hahkon; many, many thanks."

The men belonging to the dragon proved to be well-skilled shipwrights, whom Hahkon had induced to come to England. They were received by Eadbreht, who led them to his house and feasted them right royally. The shire-reeve, or leading noble of the shire, on hearing of King Alfred's visit, came with a gallant train to meet him, and offered him his dwelling. This the good king accepted, and rode with Hahkon, Asser, and the train to taste the reeve's good cheer.

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

HOW HAIKON AND ORM SETTLED IN ENGLAND.

SHORTLY after the events chronicled in the last chapter, the king, taking courteous leave, commenced his journey back to Wilton, where he held his court. Hahkon was glad to see the pleasure which his return to England gave. The ladies Ethelswitha, Eadburga, and Edith, gave him a graceful welcome as to a trusted friend.

The king divided his day equally into parts, one part being devoted to some special pursuit, and a very considerable proportion was given to the exercises of religion. Nor was this duty done in any austere or ascetic spirit. To Hahkon the lovely service of the Church was already a foretaste of heaven; and after a stay of two months at Wilton, he begged to be admitted to the Church.

Great were the rejoicings that ushered Hahkon into the Christian fold. The king became his god-father. Gifts were brought to him from every part of England. The ladies of King Alfred's family, the children, boys and girls, all liked the Swede immensely.

The work of building ships went on. The Swedish craftsmen, brought by Hahkon, taught the English how to construct a hull that should be strong,

yet swift. The dragon he had brought was followed soon by others built at Tredalund, where Orm had charge; and by degrees the English fleet was able to attack the Danish vikings.

When Hahkon for the second time received the Christian rite, Alfred bestowed on him the name of Ethelhelm [the noble guard], and when the Danes retired from Mercia he made him viceroy of that country. Thus, with the faith of Alfred, he embraced the nationality of England. He had no ties in Sweden. Orm thought of joining him in England, and the unsettled state of Scandinavia offered no such attractions to Hahkon as England did, for when the king had made him viceroy in the land of Mercia, the Lady Eadburga became his wife.

But troubles soon arose. The dreaded Hastings, who with his vikings ravaged every land throughout the whole of Europe, now called on Guthorm-Ethelstan to march with him on an expedition against the Franks. Guthorm joined him with glee, and their arms were successful. Guthorm then returned to his East Anglians, and Hastings now required his aid in crushing Alfred. The savage viking sailed up the Thames to Fulham, and claimed the aid of Guthorm by virtue of the viking laws. But Guthorm found some excuse. Hastings sailed without him, and deferred the conquest of the English until he should have punished Charles in France.

Next year the vikings came again to England, and found a warm reception from the Anglo-Danes of Northumbria and East Anglia; but neither of these provinces cared much for war, because they had tasted the blessings of peace and civilisation, so Hastings resolved to attack Alfred single-handed.

Leaving the mouth of the Humber he sailed to the Thames, and disembarking at Thanet he advanced on Rochester. Here he found better fortifications than was usual amongst the Anglo-Saxons, and Hastings rapidly built a tower of wood to oppose them. He had been joined by other sea rovers at the mouth of the Thames, who had come from the land of the Franks to join him. Together it was a formidable force, and uniting to attack Rochester, they offered the most serious danger to the English that they had hitherto encountered.

Still the men of Rochester held their own until reinforcements under Hahkon arrived. These fell upon the Danes with so much fury that they were utterly routed. They left the wooden fort standing, they abandoned all their prisoners and horses, and rushing to their ships, escaped with fearful loss.

It seems that Hastings greatly resented the extraordinary missionary power of Alfred, for he was often heard to swear that the fate of Odin hung upon the viking's sword, and if that sword were once made useless by such puny knaves as Alfred, the Christian faith would triumph; "Which all the gods forbid!" That Guthorm had turned traitor to the creed he never would forgive; but even that was nothing to Hahkon's turning Englishman, and fighting against him and the other Danes. Again a fleet was fitted out by Hastings, and Hahkon was despatched as leader of the English. The two fleets met off Yarmouth, where fifteen years before Hahkon had come to England avenging Ragnar Lodbrok's death and that of Attlé Sigurdson his father. His arms were now directed against that Ragnar's dearest friend, the man into whose keeping he had confided his

four sons, so that they should be taught the art of war.

Hahkon's old experience taught him that the wedge form, so much the best on shore, was also best on the water in attack and in defence, but later he had added the system of reserve. That is to say, aboat the attacking squadron he had a line of ships which were not to engage until the wedge was in retreat or else victorious. If defeated, the wedge was to fall back on these, which might perhaps regain the day, or at the worst cover the retreat.

This disposition made, Hahkon commenced the fight, and Hastings was so well supplied with splendid fighting ships and splendid fighting men, that Hahkon's wedge was broken.

Now the reserve came up and turned the tide of war. Hastings was forced to fly, but the attacking line did not pursue the vikings. There was anxiety concerning Hahkon; some said he was slain, and thus, instead of following up their victory, the English ships followed the shattered wedge.

They came up with the squadron and found that Hahkon had been wounded, badly wounded, though not slain, and he rebuked them sorely for letting Hastings go. "Ye had him in a trap and should have brought him here bound hand and foot a prisoner." He hastily gave orders to form again, sending some of the ships belonging to the wedge to swell the line of battle. He was too much hurt to take command himself, but his old friend Yarl Thor-gills had come to visit him some months before, and begged so hard to go with him against the viking Hastings, that Hahkon took him, with King Alfred's leave, and now to him the charge was given to lead

the English back while Hahkon was carried wounded home.

But at this time the Northern seas were swarming with viking ships, and Hastings in retreating came upon a perfect fleet of friends. Thus reinforced he turned and soon encountered the squadron under Thorgills. So sharp a battle seldom had been fought. Hastings lost many ships, but Thorgills was slain in the very first encounter. The English were completely beaten, and though Hastings could not pursue his victory for want of ships and men, it was a victory, and for a time checked Alfred's progress in reforms and public benefaction.

The contest between civilisation and barbarism, between Christianity and paganism, seemed now concentrated into a duel between Alfred and Hastings. Alfred's resources were increasing, however. From the day when he routed the Danes at Ethendune, his progress was enormous. The fate of war is always fluctuating, and constant reverses came, but the good king, putting his trust in God, smiled at reverses. "*He will set it right,*" was Alfred's constant saying. But when his Swedish Hahkon was brought home with little hope of ultimate recovery, he thanked him for the victory he had gained, but added that it was to him defeat since it had cost him Hahkon.

But the sweet care of woman brought the sick man round, and some weeks later when the king returned, he found him sitting outside his dwelling with his bandaged limbs propped up. All around the house the eglantine was twined, the rich green sward looked like a velvet pall, the air was calm, no cloud was in the sky. The mighty man of war sat in that peaceful scene as an unwonted guest. On a low settle by the



"ON A LOW SETTLE . . . EADBURGA WAS SITTING READING."—p. 370.

strong man's chair the lovely Eadburga was sitting reading.

What was that gentle creature reading to the wounded champion? Words of promise, words of peace, words of hope and comfort that seemed in wonderful harmony with the scene around him. Words that sound to us now as they did in those early days of England a thousand years ago.

So rapt were husband and wife by the inner glory of those precious thoughts, that they never noticed the approach of a third party, who now stood reverently uncovered as the reading still went on, but when the Book was closed they heard a sweet clear voice pronounce the word "Amen!"

They started, turned, and saw the king.

"Nay, do not move, fair sister. How goes it with our yarl?"

"I should be sick to death of this inaction, but this gentle wife of mine makes sickness pleasant by her winsome ways. I seem to hear the angels when she reads. They are not far from me when Eadburga is by! So pray, my lord, be seated. I cannot rise to do thee honour."

"I see thee honour Him who is the King of kings, that is enough for me. And I am thankful to Him for the sight I just have seen. One of the fairest that I ever saw. But tell me, man, how art thou?"

"Nearly well, I think. What are the tidings? What of Hastings' ships?"

"The tidings are as usual; war abroad must keep the peace at home. Better to fight with Hastings on the wave than against Englishmen on land. But Guthorm, I should say Ethelstan, is dead, and I

intend to give thee the East Angle land if thou wilt have it. I want a trusty friend upon that dainty throne. What sayest thou?"

"I am most thankful for thy friendship, and will do everything I can to show my love, but——King of the East Angles! That is much——"

"Thou art a Swede, friend Ethelhelm, or Hahkon if thou wilt, and nearer to the Danes than any one I know. Besides, thou art a Christian, and can do much more to turn them to the faith than any man. I trust thou wilt say 'yes.'"

"I must say yes, when Alfred wishes it, but still I sorrow much to think how long these silly wounds will keep me on this couch."

"Are thy wounds painful?"

"No, there is no pain since Eadburga has bound them; but she is a tyrant and holds me here in golden fetters which I am far too weak to burst."

"Hast heard the news of Hastings?"

"No; I told thee so already. I long to hear it; tell it me, I pray."

"Well, then, thy second line, with Thorgills at the head, was beaten."

"Hammer of Thor!" cried Hahkon, starting up, forgetting Christianity, pain, peace, and Eadburga at that unwelcome news. He stood erect and firm. "Seward," he roared, "my arms! This is too bad! Idling and dreaming here, and war upon the water! I should have known this ere now. Sir King, this was not well! Have the Danes landed?"

"No, my good storm-wind, no. But thou art a strange Christian, Ethelhelm (nay, I must call thee Hahkon), a fierce disciple of the creed of peace. I shall have doubts of Eadburga as far as teaching

Christian duty goes ! A fiery Christian, by my faith !
Nay, sit down quietly and hear me out."

"But this is torture, good my lord ; I cannot bear it ! Hastings escaped, and I on roses here !"

"Nothing can now be done. Three weeks ago I heard the news, and three days back heard stranger."

"Ay ! what was that ?"

"Why, thy friend Orm has brought two hundred dragons !"

"And Orm is here ? Where is he ?"

"He will be here to-morrow. Peace, and listen ! It seems he thought it wise to arm some fifty ships, and load the rest with tools for shipbuilders ; and on the way he met our old friend Hastings, and straight-way went to work. Hastings was panting from his fight with Thorgills, sore of his wounds from thee ; and Orm, being fresh and merry, took half the Danish ships, scuttled the rest, and hung the pirate Hastings."

"It is too much, King Alfred ! God is too good to us. What shall we do ?"

"Render Him thanks and praises, try to do His will with His divine assistance (alone we can do nothing), and leave the end to Him."

"And Orm is coming hither ? Poor Orm ! I long to see him, and show him what thy friendship and her love," pointing to his wife, "have made so plain to me !"

"All in good time. Thou art so very fiery ; such a tempestuous Christian I have never seen ; but that is yet not all. Thy friendship has done more, and I am quite as glad of my last piece of news as thou canst be to hear of Orm's success with Hastings. Guess this piece of news."

"Indeed I cannot. Tell me what it is."

"The navigator Ochthere, whom thou didst mention to some lady near thy home"

"I know! The vala Fulda."

"The very same. She has induced this Ochthere to sail to England, and paid the price he asked her for the trip, which was not to his taste."

"What price was that? Thou speakest many riddles. A man must be a herald or a priest to guess them all."

"The price was her fair hand."

"Has she come with him?"

"Yes. She seems wealthy; they have quite a train with them. I mean to offer Ochthere some land in thy East Anglia. If he likes to stay, thou wilt have comfort in old friends on the new ground."

"She is the very best of all my youthful friends. I hope that he will make her a good husband!"

"Of course he will. He is a great geographer!"

These two assertions, though meant by Alfræd to be distinct, came so close together that they sounded like cause and effect; and the result in the simple group was a merry laugh, in which Eadburga joined.

"Well, my lords," she said, "there is some prospect of peace, and I am right glad my turbulent viking is not obliged to leave my hands just yet. The cure is not quite perfect, though the sight of Alfræd has worked, and will work, wonders."

A few days later Orm and the vala came to visit Hahkon (we beg his pardon, Ethelhelm we mean). Fulda of the "Stormy Ness" seemed ten years younger, rather than ten years older. Eadburga took to her at once, and a warm friendship sprang up between them. The beauties of the Christian faith

were unfolded to her, and she firmly declared that her mind had been prepared for its reception by some of the mysterious teachings of her own, with which she, of course, as a vala, was intimately acquainted. She said to Elswitha, Alfred's queen :

"Our faith, dear lady, is a mystic dawn, wherein we see things but imperfectly. And yet it is the herald of the sun, whose coming chases all the shades away, and makes all objects clear. Our faith has taught us that there is a God, and though he has inferiors around him, He is "Allfather." That is already a step upon the Christian ladder! We were taught that the soul lives for ever. That has paved the way, at least in my mind, for your clearer truths concerning things eternal. And I do not think it Christian to *despise* the pagan who has not the light, but strives to reach it."

The meeting of the foster-brothers must be left to the reader's warm ideas on the subject of true friendship to fill up. Orm did not go very deeply into the doctrines unfolded to him, but he accepted Christianity in the first place, it must be confessed, rather because Hahkon (he *never* called him Ethelhelm) was a Christian than anything else. But as years wore on, and he saw and heard more of these blessed teachings, there is every reason to believe that what had been received really fell upon good ground.

Alfred had conceived the plan of translating some useful books from Latin into English for his people. In this he was assisted by Asser, who has left a most interesting biography of the king (from which, indeed, some of the incidents in this story have been taken). Among these are the works of Orosius, and the consolations of Philosophy, by Boethius. Both are much

altered to suit the taste of Alfred's people, and greatly improved. In the geographical part of Orosius, we find the account by Ochthere of his voyages in the north, inserted from dictation. Another navigator, Wulfstán, also contributed to this interesting part of Alfred's work. There are other books and poems, of a religious and philosophical character, by Alfred, but the dictation by Hahkon's friend, Ochthere, has a special interest for us.

Hahkon went with his wife to East Anglia, and fully justified Alfred's wisdom in sending him thither. He was a faithful friend to Alfred, and a good ruler, and in time the wisdom of Providence became evident in sending the Danes and Swedes to infuse fresh Scandinavian vigour into their degenerate kinsmen, the English, who in their turn conferred on the pagans the inestimable blessings of Christianity.

Hahkon was never called King of East Anglia, the last person who bore that title being the Danish Guthorm.

Orm married Edith, and remained in high favour with Alfred, for his honesty of purpose and strong good sense. He superintended the construction of Alfred's navy, which cleared the waters of the infesting vikings. When strongly armed without he had peace within, and the efficiency of the successors of Alfred's war-ships, in the hands of Alfred's people, may be taken as a guarantee of the peace of the world, and the spread of Christianity.

THE END.

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